Explore, Create, Play:

A Qualitative Study on Children's Experience with Contact Improvisation

by

Angel Crissman

A Bound Document Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

Approved April 2014 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Karen Schupp, Chair
Becky Dyer
Timothy O'Donnell

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2014

ABSTRACT

This study intended to identify what children's perceptions and experiences are with contact improvisation and how these experiences relate to their education; their understanding of being an individual within a community; and their physical, social, and intellectual development. An interpretive phenomenological research model was used, because this study aimed to understand and interpret the children's experience with contact improvisation in order to find meaning relating to the form's possible benefits. The research was conducted over the course of ten weeks, which included classes, interviews, discussions, questionnaires, and journals. This study showed that contact improvisation empowered the children, opened the children's awareness, developed critical thinking, and created a deeper understanding and trust of the self and relationships formed within the class. The experiences found through teaching contact improvisation to these children showed that there are benefits to teaching children the form.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Engaging with dance allows participants to experience creativity, self-awareness, and connections with others through expressive bodily movement. Shared conceptions of the body and self, along with the movement experiences society offers us, are a primary way of knowing, understanding, and making sense of the world.[1] As such, dance has tremendous potential to empower students as individuals and to help them learn to relate to others. Contact improvisation directly addresses this, as it is a cultural dance form that combines the laws of physics with physical movement, usually through touch, which can bring awareness to the individual and their relationship with others. Contact improvisation can be defined as

> a duet movement form… based on the communication between two moving bodies that are in physical contact and their combined relationship to the physical laws governing their motion - gravity, momentum, friction, inertia, centrifugal force, etc.[2]

Through the physical communication that contact improvisation uses, different skills and cultural ideals of touch are also addressed. Cynthia Novack indicated how "contact improvisation embodies issues which must be negotiated in American culture, concepts and practices of physical skill, art, mind, body, touch, movement, play, sexuality, freedom, and difference."[3] Since its inception by Steve

---

[1] Cynthia J. Novack, *Sharing the Dance Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (Madison, WI: University of Winsconson Press, 1990), 8.
[2] David Koteen and Nancy Stark Smith, *Caught Falling The Confluence of Contact Improvisation, Nancy Stark Smith, and Other Moving Ideas* (Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 2008), xiii.
[3] Novack, *Sharing the Dance,* 12.

Paxton in 1972, contact improvisation has gone against the social norms of touch and has brought awareness to how knowledge can be gained though physical dialogue with others. As contact improvisation continued to grow, Paxton did not codify contact improvisation, which allowed the initial performers to teach it in a manner that brought their own way of understanding and movement into the development of the form. The different personal influences, thoughts, body patterns, and experiences created different definitions and approaches to learning and teaching contact improvisation. Even Paxton, Nancy Stark Smith (one of the original practitioners), and Nina Little (another one of the original practitioners) have different perspectives on and definitions of contact improvisation.

Past teachers, the jams I have attended, how I approach the form, and experiences I have had, influence my definition of contact improvisation and research. I was first exposed to partnering and then to contact improvisation as an undergraduate dance major. I quickly latched onto the principles, concepts, and the sensations it gave me as a dancer, choreographer, teacher, and person. Contact improvisation was fascinating to me because it required me to come into physical contact with another person while dancing for more than a few seconds, which was a new experience for me. I initially used contact improvisation to create partnering in dance works, and this approach continued until I was part of a work choreographed by one of my undergraduate faculty members. As a part of the rehearsal process we did scores, a compilations of ideas used to guide the dance process and/or performance, where the main goals were not to remember lifts or combinations of movements, but rather to become in tune with each other and to

understand each other's movements and weight. Through experiencing contact improvisation in this rehearsal process, I found a deeper connection to my own movement experience and to other dancers. My whole body awakened in a new way by listening and responding through sensations. Paxton frequently talks about how "contact [improvisation] deals with images or ideas which are sensations first, then felt by the mind."[4] The senses in the body are stimulated and the body can respond often times before the mind responds. In my case these sensations and concepts led to more workshops and jams, events where dancers at all levels come together to move, where I began to really understand what contact improvisation was and how much it affected the way I interact with and see the world. I continually enjoy playing with and sensing how contact improvisation opens my self-awareness and how opening my awareness affects how I relate to others. As my practice continues to develop and grow, I enjoy how contact improvisation incorporates ideas of self-awareness, openness, physical listening and communication, trust, embodiment, presence in the moment, and choice, which directly effects my daily life. The more I practiced and learned about contact improvisation, the more it became integrated into other areas of interest including performance and education.

Statement of Problem

While receiving a degree in education, I became interested in what contact improvisation could teach children about themselves and how they relate to each other, specifically through their experience. I was interested in knowing what

[4] Steve Paxton, "Fall After Newton Transcript," in *Contact Improvisation Sourcebook v. 1*, ed. Nancy Stark Smith and Lisa Nelson, (Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 1997), 143.

children experience while dancing contact improvisation relative to the ideas that I directly apply to the form to such as relationships built through physical contact, self-awareness, trust, choice, openness, and physical listening. I wanted to know if these concepts that I use to inform how I sense and experience not only in contact improvisation, but also in the world, could benefit the development of children. The more research I read the more I became aware that there is little research about children doing contact improvisation with other children. Any reference to children seemed to mostly consist of articles addressing children with disabilities,[5] descriptions of exercises used to teach contact improvisation to children,[6] and children dancing with their parents.[7] For example, Judy Stone's research into how contact improvisation can help children with tactile phobias demonstrates how physical interaction can open up children to initiate contact and enjoy physical contact.[8] Other research has focused on various ways to teach children contact improvisation rather than the children's experiences with the form and what affect it has on them. Lauren Shapiro Raker's work, for example, focuses on giving dance educators games that involve contact improvisation rather than what the children thought of those games.[9] Though previous published research is helpful for

---

[5] Alice Lusterman, "Structuring Contact Activities for Children with Learning Disabilities," *Contact Quarterly:*
A Vehicle for Moving Ideas 9, no. 1 (1983): 51.

[6] Richard Heckler, "Working with Children," *Contact Improvisation* 9, no. 2 (1984): 9-16.

[7] Sandra Jamrog, "Baby Contact," in *Contact Improvisation Sourcebook v. 1*, ed. Nancy Stark Smith and Lisa Nelson, (Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 1997), 225.

[8] Judy Stone, "Giant Steps Contacting Children with Neuro-Integrative Dysfunction," in *Contact Improvisation Sourcebook v. 1*, ed. Nancy Stark Smith and Lisa Nelson (Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 1997), 218.

[9] Lauren Shapiro Raker, "A Contact Project with Young Children," in *Contact Improvisation Sourcebook v. 1*, ed. Nancy Stark Smith and Lisa Nelson, (Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 1997), 219.

designing a curriculum to teach Contact Improvisation, it does not directly document or examine the experiences that children have in contact improvisation.

The research study specifically looks at how children experience contact improvisation. One of the main elements that can lead to positive benefits from participating in contact improvisation is touch. As humans we exist and relate to the world though all our senses, including touch. As children progress through school, touch often times comes through sports, which usually focuses on competition and power as the foreground of the activity. Unlike the physical contact seen in sports, contact improvisation is an activity where participants are physically connected and where touch is mutual, equal, and nonviolent or non-defensive, which can open up participants to listening, understanding, and responding instead of reacting. The end goal of contact improvisation is not to win, control the other person, or to overpower each other, like getting more points than the other team or the focus on having the ball more than the other team. Contact improvisation asks what the body can do, not what the body can be made to do; emphasis is placed on the letting, allowing, and releasing, rather than getting, achieving, taking, and putting.[10] In contact improvisation, there is often an exploration with touch aiming to enhance creativity, physicality, equality, presence in the moment, and individuality. These goals can help children to understand themselves and how they relate to others within their community.

---

[10] Novack, *Sharing the Dance,* 181.

Understanding children's experience with contact improvisation can provide insight into how they experience and see the form. This insight can help children to better understand themselves and their relationship to others in their community; develop communication, creativity, and problem-solving skills; and formulate teaching environments conducive to the way children learn. Many adults have benefited from participating in contact improvisation, and this study aimed to see if the same benefits are found when children participate in contact improvisation. This study endeavored to document children's experiences with contact improvisation and its affect on them.

Purpose Statement

This research study focused on typically developing children, children without disabilities, which were in third and fourth grade or between the ages of eight to ten years old. The goal of the classes was to empower students to understand self-responsibility and how this can affect their community. Through my specific view and practice of contact improvisation and its relationship to touch, I aimed to create awareness and respect for the self so the students could trust who they are, which in turn creates relationships and helps them make choices that reflects that awareness and trust. Exploring what children experience in contact improvisation can bring insight into benefits this form can have in schools.

By teaching children contact improvisation, this study aimed to give value to their experiences, to see if benefits emerged from the children's experience, and how these benefits shape their interactions with the world. More specifically it aims to identify what children's perceptions and experiences are with contact

improvisation and how these experiences relate to their physical, social, and intellectual development, their education, and their understanding of being an individual within a community.

Research Questions

1. What are 8-10 year old children's embodied experiences: emotion, evaluation, and intuitions, over a period of ten weeks in contact improvisation?

2. What areas of development do these experiences relate to: physical, social, and intellectual development? How do they relate to these areas?

3. Do these experiences relate to the benefit of teaching contact improvisation to children as it relates to children's interactions with others and the world?

Summary

Chapter one introduced contact improvisation by giving a brief summery of its history. The problem, purpose, and development of the research questions were also stated. Chapter two presents a review of the literature covering contact improvisation concepts, pedagogical approaches, and community. Chapter three frames the research questions in the conceptual framework of interpretive phenomenology. The role of the researcher, assumptions made in the study, and the limitations of the study are also included. Chapter four indicates the methodology of the study. A description of the participants, research site, lecture demonstration, data collection methods and analysis, and the trustworthiness of the study are included in this chapter. Chapter five includes the structure of the classes and the teaching approach used over the course of the ten-week class. The structure of the classes is broken down into the creation of a supportive space, how apparatuses were used to support and teach contact improvisation concepts, and the creation of

scores related to contact improvisation concepts. Chapter six analyzes the children's perceptions and experiences of the scores and the space, intellectual processes, and the community of practice created through the study. Chapter seven concludes the research through synthesizing the results and the research questions, and commenting on future research for this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Concepts Found in Contact Improvisation

In the beginning, contact improvisation was primarily about physics and how "invention arises through interaction of the laws of physics with the living structure of the body."[11] This idea led to the principles of contact improvisation that relate to physics such as falling, lofting, orientation and disorientation, and small dance (standing and attuning with your own reflexes). As more people started to teach and dance contact improvisation, the ideas and possibilities of the form continued to include the body in relation to the laws of physics as well as expanding to include concepts such as trust, openness, touch, embodiment, presence in the moment, focus, confidence, problem solving, listening, relationship, choice, and awareness. These concepts can address and develop physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and communication skills, and have been shown to affect not only adults' practice of contact improvisation, but to transfer to aspects outside of contact improvisation classes and jams.

Daniel Lepkoff, one of the original practitioners of contact improvisation, reflected that contact improvisation was not "dance" but living, that the forces at play between two people dancing are the same as those which exist day to day, and the strong sense of self he experienced within contact improvisation was nothing

[11] Daniel Lepkoff, "Contact Improvisation, or, What Happens When I Focus My Attention on the Sensations of Gravity, the Earth, and My Partner?," *Contact Quarterly* 25:1 (2000): 62.

but his everyday self.[12] Lepkoff and others realized how the choices they make in contact improvisation and the patterns revealed through movement in relation to others directly reflected how they live outside the dance. Lepkoff talks about his experience of contact improvisation as being more than just the dance by stating, "living in ones body need not be confined to dance class, but is a way to spend time, anytime, and perhaps all the time."[13] When Smith was asked why she continues to teach and practice the form after 41 years, she gave three reasons: there was so much space to explore within the form; when she shares the form she learns more; and that even when her research is outside the realm of contact improvisation, she is drawn back to it because there is nothing that satisfies what contact improvisation satisfies.[14]

Through the relationships created in the contact improvisation community over time, trust of the self and others can build; awareness of the body and how it relates to others and the space is heightened; openness to new ideas and movement is crucial to create relationships and movement; acceptance of each other is valued; and judgment on the self or each other is discouraged. Contact improvisation can create a space that empowers individuals and emphasizes respect of others in the space, which can lead to trust and acceptance. Essentially,

> Contact improvisation nurtures a basic physical trust between two people and a group. The form demands a care and consideration of one's partner and towards this end seeks to develop sensitivity and confidence. This trust

[12] Lepkoff, "What Happens," 62.
[13] Lepkoff, "What Happens," 62.
[14] Nancy Stark Smith. Interview by Angel Crissman. Discussion. Earthdance Plainfield, MA, January 21, 2013.

> and the freedom, which ensues kindles a rich and fertile environment for working creatively with another person.[15]

As the dancer opens to this way of working, the brief moment where choices are made can be expanded, which creates a space for responses to occur instead of reactions. Touch in contact improvisation aims to be equalitarian, supportive, respectful, and playful. If more people could experience this way of relating to all aspects of life, so much could be possible.

The research about how adults have been affected by practicing contact improvisation leads to questions about whether these ideas of openness, trust, choice making, responding, empowerment, and sensitivity can be felt by children who experience the form and how the experience of contact improvisation affects how they see themselves and function in their larger communities. Since there is no published research about typically developing children's experience with contact improvisation, it is unknown if children find the same concepts in their practice.

Pedagogical Approach to Contact Improvisation

In contact improvisation learning often occurs through interaction with the material, laws of physics, and principles dealing with physical contact through solo work, duet work, or group work, in order to better understand the self and its relationship to others. This way of learning relates to the educational philosophy that John Dewey proposed, which contributed to ideas in progressive education. Dewey believed in two sides of education, the psychological and sociological, which

[15] Daniel Lepkoff, "The Education Value of Contact Improvisation for the College Student," in *Contact Improvisation Sourcebook v. 1*, ed. Nancy Stark Smith and Lisa Nelson, (Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 1997), 55.

are organically related and cannot be attended to separately.[16] For Dewey, education was meant to be a way to learn how to live and not a prearranged set of ideas that one should learn. Contact improvisation aims to teach participants about the whole self, finding each person's potential, and exploring movement through that potential instead of teaching a particular set of steps or technique. Dewey believed "to prepare [people] for the future life means to give [them] command of [themselves]; it means so to train [them] that [they] will have the full and ready use of all [their] capacities."[17] Contact improvisation intends to give value to individuals, which then gives value to their experiences with the world. Contact improvisation teaches through sensations, exploration, and experiences, and is in line with Dewey's philosophies.

Just like a teacher following progressive education, the teacher in contact improvisation provides principles and concepts that allow students to explore and learn at their own pace. The teacher becomes a facilitator guiding students to find their own responses and understanding of their bodies. The facilitator encourages construction of knowledge through asking questions, challenging ideas, and creating an atmosphere where inquiry arises and understanding deepens. Through this approach, contact improvisation pedagogy could be categorized under constructivist education.

Constructivist education encourages teachers to accept student autonomy, use cognitive terminology, allow students responses to shift instructional strategies

[16] John Dewey, "My Pedagogic Creed," accessed February 13, 2013, http://dewey.pragmatism.org/creed.htm.
[17] Dewey, "My Pedagogic Creed."

or alter content, and support creation of knowledge through open ended questions, elaboration of answers, and encouraging dialogue.[18] Often times the facilitator of a contact improvisation class or workshop gauges the energy of the room and constantly shifts scores and structures in order to provide the group with what is needed for continued engagement and learning. The facilitator encourages exploration of bigger ideas and asks open questions regarding what the individuals learned and understood from the scores. In contact improvisation not only does the practitioner learn by practicing and embodying the form, but they also construct knowledge from interacting, problem solving, and engaging with their community and the concepts presented.

Since contact improvisation is not codified, people are free to teach from what they have experienced, what they know, and from their own understanding. Though there is not one specific way of teaching contact improvisation, the style and qualities that practitioners develop are related and can be identified as contact improvisation when watching the form. This open approach to contact improvisation can be positive for students because studying with different teachers provides different views on the form and expands the ways of experiencing movement and understanding concepts. Like the intention of constructivist teaching, the opportunity to take from many teachers can give practitioners of the form multiple ways to understand or challenge their knowledge of concepts, and to

[18] Jacueline Grennon Brooks and Martin G Brooks, *I Search of Understanding: The Case for Constructivist Classrooms*, (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development, 1999), 103-111.

continuously refine, engage, and create their own definitions of contact improvisation.

At the start of the form, the lack of codification in contact improvisation started to generate a concern for safety as performances increased and more people wanted to learn the form. Since there was no technique to learn and teach, some facilitators taught contact improvisation based on what they had seen in these performances, which was the higher energy side of the form. Related to Dewey's dual way of approaching education, contact improvisation was being taught and practiced based off the knowledge of half the form; the other subtle side of sensing and becoming aware of the self and the body was not as evident in the performances. This started to bring serious injuries to those who studied it from people who really did not understand the form. As a response to this, instead of regulating contact improvisation, Paxton along with some of the first dancers decided to start a newsletter, now known as *Contact Quarterly*, where people could talk to each other about what was happening in the form, exchange teaching ideas, and share explorations and research within the form. Continuing to teach safely was done through exploration and communication with other teachers. Practicing or teaching the form was not given by a certain school or teacher telling facilitators how to teach, but rather a collective of individuals willing to share their knowledge by creating a large network of information and starting dialogues that encouraged growth in the form. Due to not codifying the form, the pedagogy of contact improvisation tends to follow a progressive teaching style aimed to address the

individual, and sharing pedagogical ideas and concepts through conversations and community.

No matter how people today may try to codify the teaching of contact improvisation, it is important to remember that "ultimately [contact improvisation's] initial stance of empowering an individual to rely on their own physical intelligence; to meet their movement with senses open and perceptions stretching; and [to] compose their own response, remains intact."[19] Each individual comes to contact improvisation in his or her own way and for his or her own reasons. Because of the freedom within the form, each person can obtain what is relevant to being.

Community

The dance form of contact improvisation has a community of people who practice the form, generate knowledge, and create meaning as a community. For contact improvisation, the center of this interaction and communication is through physical contact in jams and classes, and through *Contact Quarterly*. "Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly."[20] A community of practice, however, is more than a group of people with a common interest; it is a group that participates through shared activities to create common knowledge.

---

[19] Daniel Lepkoff, "Contact Improvisation: A Question," *Contact Quarterly*, 36:1, 2011, 38.
[20] Etienne Wegner, "Communities of Practice: a brief introduction," *Wegner- Trayner*, accessed February 5, 2014, url: http://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/06-Brief-introduction-to-communities-of-practice.pdf.

Meaning-making is about constructing a sense of what is, what actually exists, and of that which is important.[21] This creation of meaning occurs individually in relation to social and cultural experiences with groups of people, or within a community. Vygotsky's work involves the idea that human learners depend on social interaction in order to create collaborations, which promote thinking and engagement with the ideas and concepts presented in order for intellectual growth including both knowledge and understanding to occur.[22] Creation of knowledge, understanding, and importance can be formed individually, but because these are generated through social interaction, this knowledge becomes collective within the community. Since contact improvisation is not codified and does not have one set definition or set of guidelines, practicing the form with the larger community of practice over time will help individuals discover what contact improvisation is and if they are dancing it.[23]

[21] Wilfred H. Drath and Charles J. Palus, *Making common sense: leadership as meaning-making in a community of practice*, (Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership,1994), 9.
[22] Alan Pritchard and John Woollard, *Psychology for the classroom: constructivism and social learning*, (London: Routledge, 2010), 35.
[23] Novack, *Sharing the Legacy,* 197-198.

CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Interpretive Phenomenology

The research study focused on the embodied experiences of children when exposed to the form contact improvisation. An interpretive phenomenology research model was used, because this study aimed to understand and interpret the children's experience with contact improvisation in order to find meaning relating to its possible benefits. In qualitative research, a study using the phenomenology foundation emphasizes experiences of the participants. Specifically the goal of interpretive phenomenology is to "describe, understand, and interpret participants' experiences."[24]

Children's interpretations and thought process are different than adults', and though what they experience is valid, other ways of collecting data can be used in order to better interpret the children's experiences. The children's experiences were interpreted though observing the students and having parents fill out questionnaires. These other ways of collecting data, such as interviews, observations, and questionnaires are important to include because this study specifically addresses areas in contact improvisation dealing with touch, relationships, and expressing the self through moving the body, which can be different for each child depending on their past experiences with each of these ideas. Understanding children's prior experiences with touch, relationships, and idea of

[24] Dympna Tuohy. "An Overview of Interpretive Phenomenology as a Research Methodology," *Nurse Researcher.* 20:6, (2013), 18.

self can contextualize analysis of the approach they took to learning the form, their attitude toward the form, and any changes that might have occurred over the course of the study.

Role of Researcher

The researcher in interpretive phenomenology aims to obtain knowledge of the quality and texture of the participants experiences by positioning the information in relation to social, cultural, and theoretical context and providing a critical and conceptual commentary upon the participants' personal meaning making.[25] In this study, I was not only the researcher but also the teacher and an observer. In this aspect I constructed meaning with the class in the classroom. As the facilitator, I had control over most of the exercises and topics covered, and therefore exerted some influence over the students' meaning-making. The intent was to give principles and exercises where students could draw from their own experiences, patterns, and relationships to make their own meaning. As the observer I documented how the students interacted with each other and the material presented over the period of the ten classes. By being the researcher, connections were made between what the students wrote in their journals and the movements explored in the related score. Being aware of these three relationships with the students was important in determining interview questions, applying principles used in class, and analyzing development and connections created in the class.

---

[25] Carla Willig, "Perspectives on the Epistemological Basis for Qualitative Research," in *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology: Vol. 1 Foundations, Planning, Measures, and Psychometrics,* ed. H. Cooper (Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2012), 11-14.

Assumptions of the Study

In this research study, it was assumed that the students were unfamiliar with contact improvisation and had little dance experience. Since the study was volunteer-based, it was assumed that the students participated because they wanted to try something new and were willing to explore openly with guidance. Students were required to be in the school age bracket of third through fourth grade, ages eight to ten years old to participate in the study. In the class sessions and interviews it was assumed that the participants would be honest in their responses and not hold anything back that would support or defy the study. When facilitating classes, it was assumed that sharing and building on each other's ideas overrode the risk of peer power dynamics associated with group discussions. I assumed that through the study a relationship would be formed between contact improvisation and the children's development, possibly leading to benefits. As the researcher and facilitator of the class, I also assumed that I have the knowledge base in dance pedagogy, somatic practices, and contact improvisation to conduct the inquiry. Since I practice contact improvisation, the study was subjective because it was examined through the lens of facilitator, practitioner, and researcher.

Limitations of the Study

Children's embodied experiences with contact improvisation were examined through observation, interviews, and writing. The ability to verbally express feelings, sensations, and physical experiences in a significant way might have been difficult for children. Some experiences might have only shown up in observations of how they interacted with others, space, and the material developed within the class,

which was compared to the written and spoken experiences given by the children. Children were not solely responsible for their participation in the study since they were dependent on their guardians to provide transportation and support to the study. There were classes that each participant was not able to attend, causing them to miss the concepts, scores, approaches, and discussions addressed those days. Due to the regulations on what can be advertised in different schools and the location of the university, I was limited to where I could promote the class, causing the participants to be of a certain area and all girls. Compared to adults, eight to ten year old children also tend to have shorter attention spans, less extensive vocabulary, and less of an understanding of abstract thoughts causing the interviews to be shorter, possibly not allowing enough discussion in order to get as much information as desired.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was to document children's experiences and perceptions of concepts used in contact improvisation. While research about children's experience in contact improvisation is limited, adults have practiced contact improvisation for over forty years and have written about and discussed its benefits in dance and how those benefits transfer into their daily lives. Smith discusses how noticing one's response to challenging, fun, and intensifying relationships within the contact improvisation inside the studio reflect how one responds when faced with the same situation outside the studio.[26] This study aimed to give value to children's experience with contact improvisation and to see if the same benefits adults experience emerged from children's experience with contact improvisation, and how these benefits shape their interactions with the world. More specifically it intended to identify how children's perceptions and experiences with contact improvisation relate to their: physical, social, and intellectual development; education; and understanding of being an individual within a community.

Research Site and Participants

The site was a large university in a metropolitan city in the southwest United States. The students were recruited from the university community and the

[26] Nancy Stark Smith. Interview by Angel Crissman. Discussion. Earthdance Plainfield, MA, January 18, 2013.

surrounding metropolitan areas. This class was conducted as an extracurricular activity and not associated with an elementary school.

The research was conducted as a case study with students in third through fifth grades, ages 8-10 years old. This age range was chosen because at this age children are normally able to handle the physicality used in this dance form and they can cognitively understand the exercises and principles of the form. Because of the lack of published research about typically developing children's experiences with contact improvisation, typically developing children were examined in this research study. The study consisted of documenting six children's experience with contact improvisation over the course of ten classes and a culminating lecture demonstration. The age range of the study determined the participants. Co-ed participation was preferred, however only girls volunteered for the study. Permission from both the guardians and the children was obtained before starting the research study. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained before recruiting participants and starting the study.

When discussing the research outcomes, pseudonyms are used for any references to the students or guardians. For the study there were six girls: three eight year olds, two nine year olds, and one ten year old. The level of dance or movement experience varied greatly through the group; some were comfortable being on their hands and flipping over, and others could not do a cartwheel and did not remember much about their past dance experience. Emily, age eight, took ballet for a year and has taken a few years of gymnastics. Eight-year-old Mary took both ballet and tap when she was younger. Gymnastics was taken shortly by Molly, age

eight, and Elizabeth, nine. Susan, nine, took ballet for a year when she was younger, and Ashley who is ten, took ballet, hip-hop, and martial arts up until this year. Though some had more experience dancing and moving than others, they were all willing and comfortable moving in class. Four of the students knew each other coming into the class study, but only two considered each other close friends at the start of the study.

Lecture Demonstration

At the end of the ten-week class period there was a lecture demonstration to show family and community members what the students had learned in class. The lecture demonstration began with a short five-minute video showing rehearsal footage and talking about the process of the classes. Following the video, the children used scores and concepts from class to dance and move for fifteen minutes. After they finished their section, five college students from the university's contact improvisation class presented a score including concepts they worked on in their class. This was the first time that the children got a chance to watch people dance contact improvisation. After the college students danced for ten minutes, the children were able to join the college students in the space for ten more minutes of movement. Following the movement presentation the audience had an opportunity to ask any of the children, college students, or me questions. The purpose of the lecture demonstration was to allow family and community members to see what the children were learning as well as an opportunity to view the children in a new context, and observe how they responded to both the audience being present and the college students dancing contact improvisation.

Data Collection Methods

The data collection included interviews, reviewing student journals, classroom observations, and parent/guardian questionnaires. The purpose of including interviews, which I conducted, was for the children to feel that they were individually heard. These interviews were a way to ask specific follow up questions regarding their personal definition, interpretations, feelings, or understanding of contact improvisation. The interviews occurred with the children individually before and after the course of the classes, and were video recorded to better understand what each child was communicating through verbal and physical means. They were held in the university dance studios, the same spaces used for the contact improvisation classes, so that each child was in a familiar space that helped to create an atmosphere for more comfortable discussions. The individual interviews were essential to discovering what was most salient to the children from the classes, how they were interpreting the information explored in classes, and how they were processing the information. Group interviews were held as class discussions. In order to limit the amount of peer influence, the students had time to free write about the discussion questions or class experiences before sharing them with the group. This gave those students who were shyer or those who may have disagreed with other students a chance to voice their own thoughts and experiences without direct influence from their peers. The interviews and discussions were conducted as conversations with open-ended questions in order to get the discussion started. If a closed question was asked, it was followed with an open-ended question addressing how or why it was yes or no. If a question about a concept was too abstract for the

children to initially understand, a situation was presented for the children that required a response or possible solution to the problem.

Each student selected a personal journal from a variety of colors and designs at the start of classes. In these journals, students wrote their questions, felt experiences, score descriptions, and experiences used both as an instructional aid and to develop the research. The journal included both written and drawn interpretations of the classes, depending on the each student's chosen form of expression for a given prompt. These journals helped the children document their experiences while they were happening instead of trying to remember them later during the concluding interviews. The journals gave the children a chance to processes the information addressed in class, express themselves, and provided a way for them to comfortably voice their experiences.

The observations came from both the interviews and classes. As the teacher of the class, I kept field notes of each class. The hour-long classes were video recorded to analyze class interactions and validate my field notes and interpretations. Observing the children also helped with the general understanding of the culture and social structure of this group, which helped shape the questions and format used in the final interviews.

Since I was only able to observe the children in the classes, guardians filled out questionnaires in regards to the children's physical interaction within their family and friends and how they responded to the classes once they left class. These questionnaires helped contextualize the children's background and increased my ability to gauge the children's interaction with each other and the form.

Understanding the children's past experiences with touch, relationships, choice making, and self-expression helped me to efficiently guide them to touch within the classroom. The end interviews revealed how the children were processing and experiencing the concepts, scores, and relationships in class. The guardians filled out questionnaires before and after the study in order to assess any changes that might have occurred with the children outside the class. These answers were then compared to the observations, interviews, and children's journals in order to validate their experiences and interpretations.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed both cross-sectionally and holistically. Cross-sectional indexing of data formulates a consistent system for the complete data set according to a set of common themes.[27] Holistic data analysis looks at the whole of a particular section of the research, for example the full interviews, journal responses, and answers during discussions for Susan, to find patterns that may not appear in the cross-sectional themes.[28] The data collected for each child (notebooks, interviews, observations, and questionnaires) was analyzed holistically to understand how each child experienced contact improvisation. The class transcripts were also coded holistically for each student, to see how they progressed related to their social, physical, and intellectual development, and how their experiences related to engagement, community, and concepts of contact improvisation. The concepts specifically addressed were awareness, listening, communication, critical thinking

[27] Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching,* 2nd ed., (London: Sage,2002), 150.
[28] Mason, *Qualitative Researching,* 166.

with problem solving, and touch. In particular, the classes were analyzed to look for touch in relation to enhancing creativity, physicality, equality, presence in the moment, and individuality. Also each of the individual data collection methods, for example all interviews, were analyzed cross-sectionally to look for any common threads using the same guidelines as holistically analyzing the data. The data was then coded cross-sectionally as a whole to find common threads between all six participants using the same criteria.

Reliability and Trustworthiness

There were several features in the research design to insure reliability and trustworthiness. In order to obtain honest responses to interview questions and responses in their journals, open-ended questions were used and the interviews were conducted casually on the floor of the dance studios where the students danced. Language and examples used by this group of children were observed and incorporated into the way the questions and conversations were constructed. Data was also collected through interviews, journals, observations, and questionnaires in order to compare each of these means for a clearer interpretation. Each class and interview was video recorded in order to compare field notes to the videos to ensure accurate interpretations.

CHAPTER 5

CLASS STRUCTURE AND PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

Introduction

As the researcher and facilitator, I was interested in how much information the children needed to be able to practice contact improvisation. When contact improvisation first started, Paxton gave a few scores to the dancers to see what could emerge from those explorations. Some of the scores included running and jumping on each other, the small dance, minimal acrobatic skills (ex. rolling), soft collisions, disorientation, and stretches.[29] Smith talks about how Paxton set up contact improvisation as a frame, where he created a structure of four or five scores so it had substance and clarity, but the inside was big and open.[30] As I developed class frameworks, I aimed to put in just enough information for the children to feel comfortable moving, to be comfortable with touch, and to address safety.

The frameworks I appreciate in jams and classes create an inclusion and open atmosphere; I can see and feel awareness, listening, communication, critical thinking with problem solving, creativity, and physical contact. The combination of these factors often creates an understanding of the self and how it relates to others in the space. I used these concepts when structuring classes and scores over the ten

[29] Smith, Nancy Stark, "Harvest: One History of Contact Improvisation," In *Contact Quarterly's Contact Improvisation Sourcebook*, edited by Nancy Stark Smith and Lisa Nelson (Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 2008), 320.

[30] Nancy Stark Smith. Interview by Angel Crissman. Discussion. Earthdance Plainfield, MA, January 23, 2013.

weeks in relation to their comfort with moving, touch, and safety, while also observing and discussing how the children responded to these concepts.

Creation of Space

In order to create an incisive and open atmosphere, I started where the children were intellectually, relationally, and physically, and brought in games that were familiar, encouraged them to relate to each other, and utilized already known information. For example, I created a score where the class used normal ways of moving: jumping, turning, reaching, falling, and picking things up. As I introduced each way of moving, I related it to a situation where it would be used, and the children came up with the action. As the children went from a set order to an open score using these movements, they decided how to implement them in creative ways, some even combining multiple actions at once.

In order to truly create an open and accepting space, I did not restrict the children's choices, but rather accepted all ideas and movements as correct and valid options. This does not mean that the children were allowed to do anything they wanted, such as rebelling against the score's guidelines. The children explored the original open guidelines of a score, and then I provided comments that made them reassess the possibilities, options, and solutions to the score. For example, I did not introduce tracking by telling the class to not run without their partner, to begin touching the back, to use levels, to continue dancing, to not talk, and to use multiple body parts. Instead I introduced tracking as one person dancing with the other tracking her movement with her hand on the dancer's back. This way of presenting tracking did not actually give the students any "restrictions" because I did not say

they could not do something. As the children explored the score, I would add in more specific guidelines such as "what if you could not tell your partner what you were doing by talking," or "what if you were not allowed to use your hands." Adding in the guidelines or restrictions during the explorations gave the class a challenge or new problem to solve and allowed the children to build on previous knowledge as a way to navigate through more complex problems. When adding in the new guidelines, it was usually presented to them in a way that encouraged exploration and built upon what the class was doing. This let the children know I was present and actively engaged in the class, and that their movement was inspiring new possibilities for development. I found it was best to set up an environment where technically there were guidelines and restrictions for the score, but they were presented in a way where students were encouraged to explore their own understanding.

Allowed all ideas to be valid included recognizing all solutions and understandings of problems and concepts. Following a progressive or constructivist educational approach, I validated the children's findings or statements. If children's answers required further inquiry to deepen their understanding or a provided solution was not one that could effectively help them, I offered follow up questions or scenarios to encourage them to discover different solutions or understandings. This type of discussion or refining of scores created many "what if this…" dialogues, which encouraged engagement, critical thinking, and problem solving. Along with validating children's solutions and understandings of concepts, I validated their movement choices both verbally and physically. I found that if I did not consider

movements as strange or abnormal, the class embraced creativity while moving. For example, during the portion of the lecture demonstration when the children danced with the college students, there was a movement where the children sat in a circle and shook their hands and feet. As they did this there was giggling because it either felt strange, or it was fun and brought joy to the dancers. Since the college students validated that choice by joining in the movement, the children did not think it was a weird movement to deride, but merely a way of creatively moving that was repeated several times throughout the demonstration and mentioned in over half of the final interviews.

Demonstrating and my being physically involved in the class's explorations also contributed to an open and creative environment. When I performed scores with the children, they could see my own exploration, mistakes, problem solving, and openness to take risks. I found this to be crucial in the beginning and throughout the classes. How I interacted within the space and held the space created norms that the children learned, which I was not completely aware of until watching the videos and analyzing the classes. For example, we did not specifically discuss how to transition from person to person within a score, how to end with a partner and start with another, or how to approach the class notes to get help with what to do next in the final demonstration. When asked in the end interview what she would do when she was done with the group, Molly commented, "you would just like walk away and then like start moving when you're walking and stuff." What I realized later is that any time we switched partners within a score, I was structuring a way to continue moving through the transition and into the next partner. When it came

time for them to do this on their own, they naturally continued to move through transitions as I had inadvertently instructed them to do.

By participating in the class, I was able to dance with each student multiple times. This gave me a unique opportunity to give information and feedback to the children. While dancing together, they could sense how I was using touch and tone, responding, problem solving, focusing, and being aware. Through this interaction they could relate to this information kinesthetically in their own body or intellectually, like some of the original practitioners did when they learned it from Paxton. In the early rehearsals of contact improvisation Lepkoff tried to understand what Paxton was looking for in movement and ideas, and felt he never fully understood it. "Whatever it was that I did understand touched me, soaked into my skin."[31] Dancing with the children in class helped them to learn concepts kinesthetically, which they could then translate into their dances with other students. Participating with the children during contact improvisation scores motivated, engaged, and excited the students. The children were constantly asking to be my partner, and they were all willing to demonstrate with me at any given time.

Use of Apparatuses

Working with children provided a new approach to addressing safety, relationship, focus, and preparation for contact improvisation concepts. One important element implemented in class was the use of apparatuses in order for the students to stay safe, feel confident and secure, prepare for touch, focus, and isolate

[31] Lepkoff, "A Question," 40.

different concepts. Middle-aged children, six to twelve year olds, often find it difficult to reason about abstract concepts they have not experienced.[32] Because children have difficulty intellectually focusing on abstract concepts, I created scenarios for the children to physically interact with some of contact improvisation's abstract ideas. Though apparatuses are often not used when teaching contact improvisation, I found that it was a crucial part in the children's understanding, problem solving, focus, communication, and sensing through the body.

A class goal was to open up all possibilities of movement including low-level rolling or sliding, and inversion work. Providing the class with mats during the initial exploration of this movement created a space where they could push the limits of their physical and emotional ability, knowing that they had a soft place to land. As we explored how to use the ground to transition from high to low space and began to do this efficiently, we were able to take away the mats. When we started trust falls, where one partner stands in front and intentionally falls backwards relying on their partner behind them to catch them, and counter balancing, the use of a partner to balance weight reaching either away or towards the partner, for the first time, we did so without the mats and with little or no reserve on the children's part. They also understood how to use the ground in order to respond to what happened as they explored lifting. Within two classes of introducing weight sharing,

[32] Cynthia Lightfoot and Micheal Cole, *The Development of Children*, 7th ed. (New York: Worth Publishers, 2013), 408.

two of the children were lifting each other on their backs while changing levels with ease.

In order to increase awareness, listening, and communication through the body, we explored movement and touch by using blindfolds and different props including rubber bouncy balls, tunnels made from mats, chairs, and ballet barres. In one score I set up an open obstacle course for the children to guide their partner through, using the guidelines of no talking, limiting the use of the hands, and taking their partner through the obstacle course in any way they would like. This score encouraged the children to listen to the differences in quality of touch, find other means of guiding their partner, trust that their partner would guide them safely, and focus through the body. This was the first time that the class started to demonstrate understanding of how to listen and communicate through the body, a start to a longer exploration leading to a deeper understanding.

The use of medium-sized rubber balls were initially used in order to bridge the gap of solo improvisation and contact improvisation; however, they proved to be more useful and we returned to them a few times over the course of the classes. The use of the balls helped the children understand awareness, focus, how slowing down can be useful, communication without talking or use of hand gestures, how one choice affects others, and much more. Due to underestimating teaching benefits of the balls initially, their full effectiveness was not implemented in this study. Each time we came back to the balls, the children became more aware and responsive to their partner.

Creation of Scores

When creating the development of the classes and the individual scores, I aimed to address concepts I connect to and often found in contact improvisation related to areas outside of the classroom, for example empowerment and responsibility within a community, and to create a smooth and safe entrance into touch. I intended to address the contact improvisation concepts of awareness, listening, communication, critical thinking with problem solving, and touch aiming to enhance creativity, physicality, equality, presence in the moment, and individuality. As the classes progressed, I adapted the scores and concepts to address areas that the children had trouble understanding and embodying.

Preparing the children for physical contact started in the beginning and consisted of small scores utilizing short physical contact and solo work addressing the concepts used in contact improvisation. From week two, touch was involved to simply introduce physical contact and to address trust, awareness, and listening. This occurred though scores where one partner closed her eyes and the other led her through the space at different speeds, at various levels, and giving physical sensory interaction with the objects in the space. We also started tracking on the second day, keeping the contact to one hand on the upper back of the partner. The tracking score came back throughout the classes, evolving each time it returned to increase the amount of touch between partners and to incorporate what it meant to be a leader, listening, and communicating through the body**.** I also intentionally addressed these contact improvisation concepts in solo work so the class could gain an intellectual and physical understanding of concepts before working with a

partner. For example, we learned scores that addressed melting into rolling or sliding, as well as inversion work in and out of the floor, inverting the body to balance on the arms. These scores helped the children learn to soften into the body's joints and use of tone before coming in and out of the floor with a partner.

Bridging improvisation and contact improvisation happened sooner than expected. In the class before I intended to start full contact, Elizabeth followed me around during a melting and rolling score until the right moment came when she jumped on me and melted to the floor with me. Almost immediately the rest of the class found a partner and started to imitate what Elizabeth and I were doing. Without my prompting, they had already made the switch to moving together in contact.

In order to encourage empowerment, responsibility within a community, and equality, I created scores that focused on teamwork, group responsibility, and attention to how individual choices affect others. The human knot, a score where a group reaches into a circle to grab hands and make a knot that they then work together to untangle, was used to help the children both physically and visually see the effect of working together or not working together and what types of communication are useful. We also drew together to show how we could build off of each other's choices while working together to create something. I also reintroduced working with the ball and a partner in order to slow the students down, create focus, promote team work, use problem solving, and address skills used to navigate the space between two dancing bodies.

To address communicating through the body, awareness using all the senses, physical listening, and problem solving, I had the students do a few scores with their eyes closed. For example, I set up an obstacle course where one partner was blindfolded and had to listen to how their partner was making contact with them in order to know how to navigate the obstacle course. Another score started off with the children back-to-back listening to each other's breath, which led to listening in different positions, and then to moving together with eyes closed while remaining in contact. These scores with eyes closed addressed the children's need to interact with each other and the world primarily through seeing with the eyes.

When deciding on the scores to include in class, I looked for ways to address multiple concepts in a single score, and lead the children through scores adding in the layers as they went along. Readdressing different concepts through multiple scores gave different types of learners and personalities ways to find how they understood and processed the information. Layering concepts during the scores may have also unintentionally given the example of being able to adjust and create variations on the given score. By the middle and end of the class sessions, a few of the children were starting to make connections between different scores, how they could connect them, or how they could use them to create something different. Constructing the space to develop made it important to leave scores open while at the same time held in order to lead the children into a creative space where they could explore concepts and develop intellectually, socially, and physically.

CHAPTER 6

RESULTS

Introduction

The data analyzed in this chapter are from the children's journals, interviews, class discussions, parental questionnaires, and my observations. The children's experiences and understanding have been categorized into four main categories: *children's perceptions of and experiences from the scores*, *perceptions of and experiences with the creation of space*, *intellectual processes*, and *community*. Each of these categories has sub themes that relate to the children's specific experiences and discoveries. Since the data consists of the children's felt experiences, the interpretation of this data includes discovering relationships between the different data collection methods.

Children's Perceptions and Experiences from the Scores

Through out the classes, it was interesting to see how each student discovered an understanding of the concepts within each score. Some of the students were kinesthetic learners first understanding the concepts through movement exploration and later intellectually, and others needed to intellectually understand or process the information before they could begin to physically explore the possibilities within the score. In class there were often bursts of verbal acknowledgement when a connection was made filling the space with "look at me I got it," "ohhhh I get it," and "I got it!" Over the course of the ten-weeks, students' interaction with each other and the material also suggested that they were

physically embodying the movement and concepts of self-awareness, focus and presence, nonverbal communication, listening, touch, choice, and equality.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness was a concept addressed throughout class scores. One of these scores is the small dance, the experience of standing and attuning with individuals own reflexes that adjust everything to keep them upright, introduced in the third week of class. While experiencing the small dance, the students were excited and understood the idea of relaxing to the point of sensing how the body naturally moves in order to maintain verticality.

RESEARCHER. Keep your eyes closed and just listen. *[short pause]* It's called the small dance. What is going to happen is you're going to think of a pole or a piece of wood going from the middle of your feet all the way through your body through the top of your spine, through the head, *[Short pause]* or your head as a balloon flying up to the ceiling, *[pause]* pretend your arms are strings hanging down to the floor, and try to relax your muscles so you're barely standing.

MOLLY. Kabaam.

RESEARCHER. Keeping eyes closed, [short pause] and you'll notice if you're really relaxed that you might be shifting just a little bit, [short pause] like you're shaking a little bit…and that's what's called the small dance. So see if you can find that, so that you are so relaxed your body just moves a little bit on its own.

MOLLY. This is crazy.

EMILY. I'm doing it.

RESEARCHER. Mmhm. What's crazy is that this is happening all the time whether you are walking, running, flipping around, or playing games. Your body is always doing this, the small dance, and sometimes it is fun to find it.

ELIZABETH. I'm doing it.

This observation of the children's embodiment and verbal acknowledgement of the small dance was confirmed in their journal writings. Students described the small dance as "tingling," "like I was asleep," "still and focused," "releasing," and "fun." Molly particularly connected to the small dance, and not only brought it up as an option for warming up every class thereafter, but also asked to do the small dance

when she got a little tired and needed to re-energize. I had not anticipated the children's connection to the small dance and their ability to sense it in such a quick manner. The ability and willingness of the class to come back to this score helped the children become aware of their own body, to settle into their body and the space, and to create focus before engaging in other scores.

Focus and Presence

Creating scores to help the children slow down and focus on one idea or on each other was often challenging. Using the balls was one of the most helpful strategies to create focus and fully engaging the children in the score. The greatest source of learning came from moving the ball between two bodies. The first time we tried this score, the children were laughing, talking, and excited about the task. They were so excited that they eagerly jumped into the exploration causing them to drop the ball numerous times, which then led to even more laughing and running in the space.

The journal writing and discussion following this score helped the students and I understand what they were actually processing through their vibrant attempts at the score. The children wrote about how dancing with two people was different than dancing with one person and a wall, and what they had to think about in order to keep the ball from falling. Susan and Molly responded writing, "I had to think about squeezing," and "I had to think about watching where the ball was." The discussion after the journal writing revealed even more descriptions and solutions to the problem of keeping the ball from falling. When asked what hints the children could share in order to help each other, Susan elaborated on what she wrote by

saying “the compression kept it pressing in toward each other.” Ashley said “you had to kind of stay in the same place and not roll around in any direction,” and Emily responded to Ashley by saying “well you had to stay in the same place the ball was.” These reactions demonstrated that the children were starting to focus on the place of contact with the ball, which related to the concept in contact improvisation often called the point of contact (the place on the body that is in physical contact with the partner). Others thought about how to anticipate their partner’s moves in order to know what they were going to do. Ashley wrote, “I had to think about where she was going,” and Emily wrote, “ I had to try to think about what we were going to do next, it was like a guessing game.” The children’s responses showed that they were starting to think about the present, however some were still thinking ahead to what could happen next. After sharing their ideas with the group, we attempted another round of the score, which ended up being a quieter and more focused attempt.

Tracking was a score that was introduced right at the beginning of the classes, and helped the children realize the need for focus and awareness when working together. Tracking is where one partner improvised through the space while the other followed them by remaining in physical contact. During the second time we did the tracking score, I noticed the children were still trying to lose or separate from their partner instead of following and moving with their partner, so I limited the score to tracking while staying in relatively the same spot. By adding this direction, the children were able to be more creative and responsive to each other. After the score the children’s journal prompt was, “What did you have to think about in order to not lose your partner?” Susan wrote, “Going slow or not do things to

hard" and Molly's response said she had to "pay attention and focus, calm, steady." Tracking was an effective score to help focus the children and to increase the amount of contact through the course of the classes.

Another score used half way through the classes that increased the children's focus on and relationship to each other was dancing together with their eyes closed. In this score the children kept their eyes closed while sitting still, then listening to the breath, and finally moving through the space. During the score, the children were excited and surprised they could hear their partner breathing; Elizabeth and Molly both vibrantly affirmed that they could hear their partner's breath. In the discussion after the score, Emily commented "that you have to go slow when you move…because if you go fast you might bump into another person and get hurt." It seemed that when I gave the children something specific to listen to or focus on, their interest in and focus on small details increased. Creating scores to address focus and to open up their senses increased the children's ability to listen and communicate kinesthetically.

Nonverbal Communication and Kinesthetic Listening

Nonverbal communication was first addressed in a discussion in the fourth week of classes by one of the children. We had not yet moved into physical contact beyond using a hand on the back or arms in order to lead partners through the space, and nonverbal listening, and communication was not yet addressed in the journal prompts. We had just finished the second time through the ball score to help prepare the children for physical contact. After the first round of this score, children discovered that they needed to go slow and focus on the ball. After the second round

of the ball score, I asked the children if they would like to say anything about their experiences. In the discussion Susan talked about how it was hard to dance with the ball, "It's like the other person has to, maybe wants to move backwards, but at the same, but you can't. If she moves backwards then the ball falls, so it's like you have to communicate between brains." When asked how they communicate between brains, the children's responses were based on visually seeing where their partner was and what they were doing, as demonstrated by Molly's response emphasizing the possibility of communicating to a partner "by trying to do what the other person is doing." This score confirmed that the children were ready to start directly exploring the contact improvisation concept of kinesthetically listening and communicating.

Through a different score midway through the classes, Molly also found the need to "read each other's brains." We revisited and developed the tracking score so that both partners were dancing and tracking at the same time. The discussion following this score showed a development of the children's understanding of how to communicate without using words.

RESEARCHER. You can try to read each other's brains. How [be]cause you can't really talk?

MOLLY. You can see what they are doing. So if they do a cartwheel *[did one]* then you can do that *[Molly hunched over and spun as if she was avoiding a cartwheel].*

RESEARCHER. Okay.

SUSAN. You can do hand signals like this [circling her hand at the wrist] if you are going to roll and then roll so they know what you are doing.

RESEARCHER. Good, hand signals.

ELIZABETH. You can hold hands and then you know what they will do.

As the discussion continued, the children mentioned different kinds of touch, for example back to back, that helped them listen to their partner to know how they were moving without seeing or talking to them.

Listening and communicating was more directly addressed through the obstacle course score, as this is a more deliberate communicating score. In this score the children led their blindfolded partner through an obstacle course without talking or using their hands. The goals of the score were to explore how to use physical touch to communicate, how to not grab or pull each other, and how to listen to the quality of touch and directions offered. This was one of the children's favorite scores, and through it they seemed to intellectually understand the concept of nonverbal communication, even if they were less able to embody it. Before the score I asked how we could listen if we were not able to talk, and immediately Susan responded saying, "oh I know like if I was walking forward and she pushes my shoulder around, then she wants me to turn around." After this example, the children seemed to intellectually understand the score; however, when they went through the obstacle course, it was not as clear due to constantly loosing contact with their partners. Although the children often let go of their partner and pushed them around with their arms and I was not sure they understood the concept with this score, they came up with ways to understand what their partner was communicating to them. Some of the children still did not quite trust their partner, but they slowed down in those moments in order to figure out where to go or what to do. In the end discussion, Emily talked about her experience, "I didn't know what she [her partner] was doing so like if she touched my arm, I'd wait till she touched it

again. So, so I'd probably, I would guess what it probably was." Susan commented that she would "touch her maybe with my arms to make sure to touch, to make sure she was pushing down instead of up or sideways, so I knew I was sitting down." Though the children were talking about guessing if they got the message right, they were putting their focus on the point of contact and listening to the direction and quality of the touch.

The children seemed to have a lot of difficulty letting go of the verbal and visual understanding of the space and scores. When asked questions, they would often respond with a solution that prioritized sight. In order to help open their senses and become aware through the whole body, I used scores that required their eyes to be closed. The first time I had them dance with their eyes closed, we started sitting back-to-back listening to their partner's breath. The score then progressed to moving throughout the entire space while remaining in pairs with eyes closed. This score was important in helping the children use touch and sound in order to move with their partner. When asked to journal about what they learned, they wrote, "I learned how to find my partner with my eyes closed," and "try to go slowly and try to listen where the person is." In the discussion after the score, Elizabeth talked about how she was able to process sounds she heard into how she moved with her partner through the space. She stated "I think you have to listen when you hear other people talking then you can, then you have a picture of where they are and you don't bump into them." Working with scores that addressed listening and communicating continued to develop over the course of the classes.

During the performance at the end of the classes was the first time that the children did not verbally communicate to each other while dancing. During the post performance question and answer, an audience member asked how it was to not talk for the whole performance, and how they communicated with each other.

MOLLY. Doing this you might like learn how to sign language with your hands, because we do that a lot to tell the person what we are trying to do, but you might not always do it, but it is okay if you do.

RESEARCHER. *[Pause]* What else did we talk about how to communicate without words?

SUSAN. We talked like, you could use your arm to make a little nudge up, or you could make a little tap on the shoulder to make them go down or um use your fingers *[circling finger]* to, to do a spiral or to spin to talk to them with your hands without using sign language.

MOLLY. *[right after Susan talked]* Oh I know, you go back to back and then you can hear what the person is going to do, if they go side or forward, or backward.

The children had learned, understood, and used the concepts of kinesthetic listening and communicating in the way they moved and improvised with each other.

The interviews conducted at the end of the classes and after the performance revealed how the children were applying the concepts of listening and communicating in scores that did not specifically address this. For example, Susan talked about how her favorite score in class was the score over, under, and around, dancing with a partner finding spaces and opportunities to go under, over, or around them. When asked why it was her favorite score, she said it was because of the options and listening that happened during the score.

> I'm use to talking a lot so when I'm not allowed to talk it's kind of weird because you have to kind of tell somebody, you know, okay I want you to go around me. Okay you could like, if you wanted them to jump over you, you could lay flat on the ground. If you wanted them to go around you maybe you could stand up, but um it is cool how you could just say, okay now I'm going to stand up, oh I want you to go around me, but you could still be on your

> hands and knees and they could do all the things. Also I thought how it was cool when you could go um do over under and around at the same time.

In contact improvisation a good partner often times is a great kinesthetic listener. The concept of listening and communicating kinesthetically was used in most of the scores, and the children were able to understand its importance even before they knew how to implement it into their dance. Being able to communicate through physical touch was important in how the children addressed touch and choices in partner work.

Physical Contact

Contact improvisation usually means the partners make physical contact with each other while moving. In class the children did not show that touch was unusual or hard for them to start incorporating. During the beginning interviews, most of the children related touch only to playing tag or hugging. Because of these associations, I had anticipated that the children would have to be prepared for physical contact in class; however I was wrong. On the first day of class Elizabeth ran over and jumped on my back while we were warming up. In the middle of another classes warm-up, Elizabeth started following me around instead of engaging with the movement, and when I asked if she was melting and encouraged her to continue the score, she carefully watched as I started melting to the ground, jumped onto me, and melted and rolled with me. Elizabeth was so excited that she immediately jumped on again, and this time I rolled on top of her. By the second time through the melting, the rest of the class were in pairs also melting and rolling over each other. The children were unreserved when dancing through the first time

full contact was made, and I continued this inquiry through different scores in the class. The first full contact play occurred during a warm-up score indicating their willingness to take risks and jump into dancing with partners. The discussion at the end of this class confirmed their comfort with being in physical contact with each other, saying dancing with a partner was hard and weird because of all the choices now available to them.

RESEARCHER. Does anyone want to say what it felt like to dance with a partner?

ASHLEY. Well, it um, felt kind of weird.

RESEARCHER. It felt kind of weird.

ASHLEY. Yeah we had to move around, and um we had to keep moving and stuff, and we both had to do the same, our ideas when we were together.

RESEARCHER. Yeah, so you both had to do both your ideas not just one idea.

EMILY. And there were all these ideas, and it was hard because you were like oh what are they going to do and it's hard.

The children indicated that it was harder to dance with a partner because of the need to work together and not necessarily because of the physical contact.

Another score where the children addressed physical contact was during a variation of the tracking score that included both partners tracking and dancing at the same time. After the score, the children were asked to journal about what they did in order to work together. Susan responded, "You had to always be touching them. Holding hands made it easier if they rolled on the floor." Ashley wrote she "had to go in the same direction with her *[Ashley's partner]*." Working together with physical interaction created more choices and challenges for the children to find solutions to.

In order to encourage safe contact, we talked about the importance of landing softly both in solo and partner work. When the children were asked what

they needed to remember when going from inversion work to rolling on the floor, they came up with numerous ways to think about landing softly. Some of the examples consisted of puppies, walking on clouds, rolling on cereal, or landing on silly putty. After we came up with ways of thinking about soft landings, I asked how we could move our bodies to make the landing soft, and they responded promptly with "oh I know you can put your hands out in front of you," "you can use the top of your toes to land on," and when asked about the legs, "oh bend them." As the children continued to use the physical ideas in conjunction with their imagery of what they were landing on, the children gradually reached the point where they were landing so soft that they were barely making noise. Once the children had grasped the understanding of the relationship between their body and the floor, we started to address these concepts with partners.

During the same class as learning to land softly, we worked on counter balancing and weight sharing. A few of the children were able to relate the early floor work to weight sharing, while others needed help understanding how to find weight sharing points on the body, and how to be kind to their partner while exploring lifting. We explored these skills through demonstrations and problem solving exercises and questions. After the children started to demonstrate a connection between landing softly out of an inversion and landing softly on their partner, the children explored the score over, under, and around with a focus on finding opportunities for counterbalancing or weight sharing. The discussion after the score showed how excited the children were about being strong enough to hold each other and an adult, as well as their comprehension of the importance of

pushing out of the floor and landing soft on each other. Susan specifically related landing softly to taking another's weight.

> It felt like it was, it was kind of hard but once you, if you kept on um pressing into the floor, it almost worked better when you were arched because they would put the weight down and then you know you could just take it in without them just coming directly and you'd just fall, so it kind of felt like me, is there someone on my back or is that just a flea.

Though the children started to understand their movement affected the quality of touch, the relationship with their partner, and what movement was available to them, some of the children did not physically demonstrate a kinesthetic understanding during scores.

The parents were invited in to watch the children perform the last class before the performance. After the children danced, the parents asked what the hardest things were to do, and Susan responded saying "the hardest thing I think is when you're um you're trying to be like clay almost and slime over them but you don't want to, um it's kind of hard to make yourself light enough you can just slip right over them." The children were great at creating imagery to help them think about how to interact with their partner; however, it did not always translate to their movement.

Choice and Equality

Often times the trouble between the partners was either the abundant amount of choices available, or the lack of choices due to their partners forcing them to follow an idea. Different scores aimed to help the children understand that it is important to give choices and that the choices let each person improvise their own thoughts in relation to each other. In the last class before the performance when the

parents asked about what was challenging, Molly responded, “the hardest thing is that when you’re like [Molly laid flat on her back] this cause you don’t know if they are going to jump over you or do a cartwheel or what over you.” Giving options to each other was a little scary for the children because they were not sure what was going to happen next. Uncertainty in a dance led to the children to be unsure of what to do with their partners and hindered their enjoyment of dancing together.

In order to better understand how to give and utilize choices while dancing, the children explored the over, under, and around score. This score made it clear to some of the children that giving options to each other while dancing together can be more fun and creative than dancing alone. The discussion after the score addressed what the children thought about dancing with partners while addressing choices. Elizabeth said it was more fun than dancing by yourself because “you have someone to do it with you and it makes it more creative.” Molly commented that it was hard because you did not know what they were going to do giving the example of “the person is like doing this [Molly gets on her hands and knees], and I didn’t know if she wanted me to go over or under.” During the conversation, Elizabeth demonstrated her understanding of giving choices and how by creating a shape or movement that gave options, it made it easier to dance with partners.

ELIZABETH. Well what we did is when she sat down I just go around her and then she went over me.

RESEARCHER. Cool so you left room for her to go around and over you.

ELIZABETH. And I was just like, so like whenever she says I don’t know what to do and then I just start going around her and I oh I can go under her or whenever I find spaces to go under her I like go under her and she knows oh she’s going under me and when I go over her she’s like oh and when I do this *[standing with legs apart]* she goes under.

…

ELIZABETH. Like if I'm down low and there is a space below me, she can say I can go under, over, or around her.
RESEARCHER. Exactly.

Elizabeth grasped the idea of not only giving options to the other person, but that when unsure about what to do, she had the option to do anything.

During Elizabeth's interview after the performance, I asked what she wanted to try, and she responded "to try dancing with up more, more then just five people, five or six people, maybe like eleven." Further into the interview we were talking about dancing with both the children and the college students together, and I asked why she liked to dance with lots of people.

ELIZABETH. It fun, like it's funner dancing with people than alone.
RESEARCHER. What makes it fun dancing with people?
ELIZABETH. You have more opportunities to do things.

Even during classes Elizabeth would make sure she danced with everyone in the class in order to have new and different choices. It seemed as though Elizabeth preferred to dance with a partner so that there could be more choices while others in the class were still worried about what their partner wanted them to do, which restricted their creativity and choices.

One of the longest discussions that addressed working with partners and offering choices came near the end of the classes following the first open dance where the children were allowed to explore any concept or score we had done in class. After the children explored dancing solo and in pairs utilizing any score or concept addressed in class, we started a conversation about what it was like being allowed to dance solo or with a partner.

EMILY. It was fun dancing by your self and with a partner.

MOLLY. Yeah.

RESEARCHER. What made it fun dancing by yourself?

EMILY. Cause usually with a partner it's crazy and sometimes, sometimes it gets too crazy and you really don't know what to do next.

RESEARCHER. What's fun when dancing with a partner?

EMILY. I just said the dancing with a partner.

RESEARCHER. Oh okay then what's fun about dancing with yourself?

EMILY. You don't have a partner so it's easier cause, so it's easier to do stuff.

MOLLY. Oh I know, um it's easier to dance by yourself because, cause you know what you, chose, what you are going to do by yourself. You're not with the other partner, you don't know which one is going to choose so it's easier to do it with.

…

SUSAN. Dancing by yourself is kind of cool because you can dance by yourself and when you get bored you can go back to dancing with a partner, and then when you get bored of that you can just go back and forth back and forth.

…

EMILY. It's easier by yourself.

RESEARCHER. Okay.

ELIZABETH. But sometimes with a partner, the partner has good ideas.

MOLLY. Sometimes a partner is funner than by yourself, but not always, but you never know.

ELIZABETH. Because me and Emily had fun by ourselves and with a partner.

RESEARCHER. Right because you two were dancing without touching, but you were still dancing together as partners.

The conversations about whether dancing with a partner was easy or hard came in and out of the entire end of class discussion. The children started to create their own dialogue without my asking questions, which lead the children to explain their views of whether it was easy or hard to dance with a partner to each other.

Even though we were near the end of the classes, the topic of choices and equality while dancing together still needed to be addressed further. The children's need to know what was going to happen, understanding of what their partner wanted them to do, or wanting to make their partner follow their idea was brought up in the first class. The concepts of equality and individuality while a part of a

group were harder to include into scores and for the children to understand. The need to know what was happening next occurred on the first day during the mirroring score, where one partner danced and the other partner followed their movements. By the end of the score the children explored one partner leading and one following, both partners leading, and both partners following. When asked to journal about which of the three were harder and why, most of them said both following was the hardest because they did not know what to do or what was going to happen next. In the following weeks before the children were introduced to full contact scores, the concepts of equality, individuality within a group, and presence in the moment into different scores were addressed.

In order to address finding equality and presence in the moment, the balls were brought into a new score. The score involved using the ball to assist the children in going in and out of the floor with their partner. The children started out with the ball between their backs, then to placing the ball between any two points on the body, and then to starting with it in one place and over the course of lowering to the ground and returning to standing the ball shifting to a new spot. This challenging score gave the children an awareness of where their weight was, where their weight had to be, and where their physical and mental focus was needed to navigate to the floor and back up while keeping the ball between them. Not only did this score center the children's focus and awareness, but it was crucial in taking away the use of the hands without indicating it as a restriction of the score. By naturally taking away the hands and focusing on the ball or their weight, the children automatically started to stray away from physically forcing their partner

down to the ground with their hands. This led to more equality between partners. For example, Elizabeth usually made contact by pushing and pulling her partners around, but by the end of this class she started to incorporate other parts of her body in order to move with her partner. This included starting to lean into Elizabeth's partner with her back while pushing out of the floor with her feet causing her to begin counterbalancing and weight sharing, and rolling around to different surfaces of her body including the belly and sides. This exercise with the ball helped the children start to understand equality and how it could lead to creative and safe movement.

Different scores including the obstacle course and over, under, and around also addressed finding equality within moving with a partner. These types of scores aimed to take away the grabbing hands, the feeling of needing to do what the partner wanted, and forcing the partner to do what they wanted. By taking these three tendencies away from the children, they were able to physically stop pushing their partners around; however, a long conversation that occurred a few classes before the performance made it was clear that the children were still thinking about what they were supposed to do. The conversation addressed whether the children thought it was hard or easy to dance with a partner, which brought up the issue of not knowing what the partner wanted them to do. In order to create a conversation about being present in the moment and making choices based off of what was happening, colors were used to express this concept. The conversation started with a bunch of different colored markers on the floor. We talked about how if I choose a color my partner can use that color with me, pick a different color, or mix our two

colors together to create a new color. Through this discussion I kept the conversation away from dance and movement and strictly focused on coloring. When they children understood what I was talking about, I asked how this could relate to dancing contact improvisation.

RESEARCHER. So how is that like dancing with your partner?
MOLLY. Ohhhh.
ELIZABETH. You can do the same and different things.
RESEARCHER. You can do the same or different things.
SUSAN. If you could combine like um, you combine colors and mix this new color, you can combine different dances and make a new dance.
RESEARCHER. That is right, you can combine your dances and make a new dance…so you guys say that sometimes it's hard to dance with a partner because you don't know what they want you to do.
MOLLY. Yes.

The children immediately understood the connection of coloring and moving together with partners. This was one of the biggest breakthroughs for the class as a whole in regards to allowing freedom for choices to be made. After a short movement example with one of the students, where the children were constantly comparing the different movements to different colors, we paired up to dance in the space. The only guideline for dancing was to mix colors, so the score became known as the mixing colors score. Before the score I had each of the pairs tell each other that "I want you to make your own choices from the colors that I have" in order to clarify that the dance requires equality in regards to the ability to relate to their partner by making their own choices.

As soon as the score was finished I asked them what they thought about dancing to make new colors and immediately the excitement unleashed. All of the

children started talking at once to say how much fun it was and describing the interesting movement that developed out of the score.

ELIZABETH. It was fun!
MOLLY. It was fun!
SUSAN. It was fun!
ELIZABETH. You were lifting me up!
SUSAN. I was going to um, if she was going to do a dance thing I would catch her legs, and then maybe if I was going to plan on um doing this *[jumping feet apart then together repeating a few times]* then I would do that while I was doing, while I was holding her legs.
MOLLY. Oh or when she was standing on my feet and then we would walk forward and backwards.

When asked if it was easier to dance with a partner this time the response was even more revealing.

MOLLY. Because you kind of had the colors and stuff.
ELIZABETH. You didn't have to copy.
EMILY. You didn't have to plan anything you just danced.
RESEARCHER. So you didn't have to plan what you wanted to do, you just did it.
ELIZABETH. Like I was yellow and you were orange.
RESEARCHER. So did you worry so much about what your partner wanted you to do?
EVERYONE. No!

The discussion led to an understanding that the children were able to be themselves and make choices in response to what as happening in the moment. The children embodied the understanding that they did not have to think ahead and plan what they were going to do or what their partner wanted them to do, but that they were free to just dance. After the discussion, the children did another score moving through different partners and solo dancing. It was great to see how their movement became less inhibited and more open and free.

Perceptions and Experience from the Creation of Space

When structuring classes I tried to create an open and inclusive space where all ideas and movements were viewed as correct and valid options. The scores were created to give the children options and freedom of movement by providing detailed guidelines to further exploration, to find safe ways of moving, and to challenge their thinking. Some of the children wrote and discussed how freeing contact improvisation was and how happy and excited they were during the classes. The children's enjoyment while dancing was also reflected in their changing attitudes about "being correct" while dancing. In the beginning classes, Molly especially was obsessed with making sure she understood and did things correctly, sometimes hollering out "like this" in the middle of dancing. By the last few classes she only asked once or twice if she was dancing correctly. From the way the children talked about other activities where they have been told what they do is wrong, their persistence indicated that most of the children are used to intense learning environments that often overpower what they do. This observation was also indicated though interviews, discussions, and journals.

On the second day of class the children executed the score where one partner had their eyes closed and the other partner led them through the space, and after which they responded to a journal prompt about what it felt like to be a leader. Ashley wrote "it felt amazing because I got to lead my partner." During the end of class journal free write for the same class, Ashley wrote that "I had the most fun in my life because I got to lead my partner and I got to be the person to move around." These journal entries indicate that Ashley does not often make her own choices or

take the role of a leader. From the beginning of the contact improvisation classes, Ashley was able to gain a sense of possibility, leadership, and support that she may not have felt outside of the class. The questionnaire filled out by her mother mentioned that she is typically shy, which supports the notion that Ashley would not normally take initiative when around others. By the end of the class, Ashley's mother mentioned she was a little less needy outside of class. It is hard to say there was a direct relationship between the class and the change outside of the class; however, her journals and excitement to take ownership of her movement shows some correlation between the two. The classroom space was created to support the children's exploration of creativity, movement, and self through contact improvisation.

Different scores and relationships empowered the children to be individuals, to step out of their comfort zone, and to value themselves and their choices. Susan especially felt empowered and free during contact improvisation as shown through different discussions and interviews. During her beginning interview she mentioned the high expectations her family has for her and how she is always being told how she plays her instrument wrong. During the class Susan was able to explore and make choices for her self, which she mentioned during the end interview. She compared the class to her experience with ballet classes, music performances, and speeches she has performed in the past. Compared to those activities, contact improvisation was very liberating.

> It made me feel like I didn't like somebody wasn't constantly [saying] "okay now you know you're doing something wrong [Susan] you have to you know, you have to do this again and do it again and do it again." With improvisation

> you don't have to memorize anything. It's all just poof, whatever I'm just going to do this right now and this and that and then that.

When asked if there was anything else she wanted to say about the class, she added, "it was free. It's not, you know, all captured up like locking yourself up in a cage, its, its letting go of life, not having to do anything a specific way, you can do it your way." During the end interview, Emily also talked about how fun the class was, how she could not mess up, and how in the performance they were free to do their own thing. When Ashley was asked if she wanted to say anything else, she said, "It was so much fun because we didn't have something set we had to do, we could move around any way we wanted. It was so much fun." As the facilitator it was interesting to hear the children talk about not having boundaries or specific things to do, since each score, including those used in the performance, had clear guidelines. From the children's descriptions of the class, it seems that the scores' structures gave the children room to explore their own solutions, experiment with possibilities, and helped them to own class concepts.

After the end performance, some of the children were surprised to hear that the college students who danced with them did not know what they were going to do, and that they even watched the children for ideas. Elizabeth specifically was shocked to hear that the college students were making up the movement by watching them, shown by opening her eyes and mouth wide and sticking out her tongue then saying, "it's like ahhhh they didn't know what they were doing and we didn't know what we were doing so it was like they watch us and we watch them."

Susan was also excited that the college students were watching them, and dancing the same way they had learned to dance.

> It's kind of it's like man if we're dancing that well and these older kids are doing the same thing then, it kind of makes you feel, I wonder how, you know, how they think of us when we dance or I know what I think of them when they dance but what, how do they think of us when we dance if they're going to copy our moves.

Having the college students dance with the children seemed to give the children confidence and a sense of equality with the older students. Susan seemed to feel supported and excited that the children knew what they were doing while performing contact improvisation and could dance the same as the college students.

Intellectual Processes

Intellectual development was harder to observe in class, and relied on the analysis of the journals, interviews, and class discussions. The children developed an understanding that there were many options and routes to get to a conclusion as well as different solutions to the same problem. For example, when the class discussed how to land softly out of inversions, the children came up with many images and ways of going in and out of the floor. The children's journals also became more descriptive and incorporated their thoughts and feelings even when they were not part of the prompt. The children's development of problem solving and critical thinking skills during discussions and scores was shown by the language and development of the questions being asked and answered.

During class, I encouraged exploration and play through offering open scores and "what if we tried this" variations to those scores. When the children made a connection, we would try their new version of the score, or I would ask questions to

further the inquiry. The children were very creative and inquisitive, and by the end of the classes they started to automatically give reasons for their thoughts or opinions without me asking follow up questions. For example, Mary would not answer any follow up questions during the beginning interview, but by the end interview she at least provided a short phrase to answer each question. Over the course of the classes, the children started to demonstrate the importance of articulating the thought processes behind their solutions.

Ashley specifically addressed thinking about why and how she did specific movement or scores, but had difficulty verbalizing her thought process. After the first score using full contact, the children wrote in their journals about what the melting and rolling score made them think. Ashley wrote about how "it made her think about what [she] had to do and why [she] had to do it." This was a different response than what the other children wrote, and Ashley talked about it again in the end interview. When asked if Ashley told anyone outside of dance about the class, she said she told her friends how and why she did particular scores. After asking for an example of what she told her friends she said,

> I told them um, we did it like um, I showed her how to do like an inversion and how to why we did it. I told her we did it that way, sometimes you can help us or sometimes we can help when we are doing [it] with our partner. When we're doing whatever we want we can think of ideas or do it by ourselves like that, [short pause] or we could use it to um help us with something or to help us create new ideas.

Ashley seemed to be saying that by working with different scores and then being asked how she processed information or movement during the scores, lead her to

make connections between scores and the realization that what she does effects other's movement and scores.

During classes, the children even started developing and exploring different variations of scores. The second time tracking was explored Molly automatically started to use different parts of the body, including the arms and back, to track her partner. Seeing this development, I opened the score to give that option to everyone in the class. Near the middle of the classes, Emily wrote that dancing with a partner melting in and out of the ground was hard and that it made her think about how she should be the tracker, combining the tracking score with the melting and rolling score. After the second attempt on the human knot score during one of the middle classes, Molly mentioned how it was hard to go under the group while staying connected without falling. This reminded Susan of trust falls and she asked if we could do them next. These are examples of how the children connected what we were doing in classes not just to current class concepts but to past experiences. During the end interview Emily talked about how coloring could be like dancing, which was surprising to hear since she was not in class the day we talked about mixing colors to create our own dance. She may have connected the drawing constructed in one of the earlier classes to how you could move.

RESEARCHER. What was your favorite part of the classes?
EMLY. When we did the coloring.
RESEARCHER. When you did the coloring, why was the coloring your favorite?
EMILY. Because I like to color.
RESEARCHER. Because you like to color, did you learn anything from the coloring that you liked?
EMILY. That we can move. That we can move anyway, like *[starts to wiggle her shoulders]* when we color we do zig zags and we can move like that too.

As the teacher and researcher, I did not make the connection between how we physically draw and write as well as the lines and colors created to how our bodies move, but Emily was able to take something she loves to do and translate it into her body.

Elizabeth discovered, from watching the college students, that "you don't have to do exactly what's on the sheet *[the cheat sheet with the scores we did in class on it incase they forgot or did not know what to do]*." Furthering the children's line of inquiry encouraged them to go deeper into their own thought processes and problem solving, which encouraged them to create and design new scores to use in class and performance. Constructing classes, discussions, and scores around questions to help the children discover and explore the possible outcomes and uses of concepts was important to their understanding that there are multiple ways to get information and respond to a situation. For example the object score was an abstract score that the children had trouble understanding the first few times we explored it. In the object score, the children would pick an object or animal and use the qualities of the object to influence their movement.

What made the score difficult was first naming different conceptual qualities the objects had and then abstractly embodying the qualities. Instead of adjusting the score to fit some of the children's direct need of intellectually understanding the conceptual qualities, I gave them time through continually bringing the score back to find how to first embody understanding of words. During one of the explorations of the object score, the children decided to dance like an apple, so we came up with

the three descriptive words of round, big, and juicy to give us ways to move. Elizabeth asked, “How do you dance juicy?” Molly responded by showing a move where she was on her knees rippling through her spine to the floor and then bouncing back into rippling to kneeling. Before others gave ideas, I asked if everyone could give an example of juicy by starting to dance. During a different object score one of the words was glowing. When they asked how to dance glowing, I immediately encouraged them to find their own way to dance glowing as they started to move through space. The children eventually did not need to verbally describe word such as juicy and glowing, but rather found the answer through their movement.

The object score helped me realize that some of the children learned more kinesthetically by embodying imagery and responding through movement then through words when answering questions or starting scores. Other children learned more intellectually through answering verbally and repeatedly asking questions about something they might not understand before starting the score. Connecting imagery and physical understanding to critical thinking and problem solving was important to explore since half the class were kinesthetic learners and half were more intellectual learners. Often when presenting the children with a problem during a score, I would ask how we could address it, and the children either explored the solution physically or verbally. When the use of the ball against the wall was introduced, the children first used the ball to balance on the wall, replicating what they had done on the floor. When asked how they could move with the ball against the wall, Elizabeth responded saying “like up and down…and you

can go side to side…if you want move with your hands," and Molly added in that she "caught [her] ball before it landed on the floor with the wall." Others in the class were physically exploring their own ideas as well as some of the suggestions offered verbally.

The next week we moved to dancing with the ball between two people and after the first attempt we gave hints to help each other find ways to keep the ball from falling.

SUSAN. The compressing. Keep it pressing in toward each other.
RESEARCHER. Right, so keep it pressing and compression, compression of the ball.
MOLLY. Keep control so you wouldn't drop the ball.
RESEARCHER. You were in control so that it would stay on the body yeah so that's good.
ASHLEY. You kind of had to stay in the same place and not roll around in any direction.
RESEARCHER. Yeah, so you can stay in the same place, yeah and not moving around in any direction.
EMILY: Well you had to stay in the same place the ball was.
RESEARCHER. Yeah, so you had to think about that one point that was touching the ball right and you had to go in toward each other right. What happens if you go away [from each other]?
ELIZABETH. The ball goes down.
RESEARCHER. Yeah, the ball is going to go down. What happens if one person goes in and the other person goes away?

Creating discussions where the children could give each other ideas of how to explore a concept opened possibilities for those who thought the score was too hard. In the previous example, Molly and Ashley had written in their journal how they had to think ahead and anticipate the partner's move, while during the discussion they both came up with ideas that gave them a way to stay present in the moment during the score.

During different scores the children started to find solutions to problems or scores, and offering them to others in the class. Susan commented on how the college students took the time to find solutions to "tangled messes," specifically in the score over, under, and around; "So if they tried doing it you know weird body formations how do you do this, *[moving as if to tangle herself up, with her eyes open and excited about what she was saying]* it was really cool in the end when you figure out how to do it." During a sliding and rolling warm up, Elizabeth found it difficult to slide on the mat and said "this might slide better [the dance floor versus the mat]." By continually asking the children to create imagery, think through situations, and to find new ways of approaching a situation, they were able to produce more possibilities and choices to utilize during scores. Discovering and exploring conceptual and physical concepts together also encouraged group discussions and relationships, and working together to find new possibilities.

Though contact improvisation uses physical movements and concepts in the practice, the ideas and benefits of the form are often abstract. Since middle-aged children, six to twelve year olds, often find it difficult to reason about abstract concepts they have not experienced, it was difficult for them to contextualize the application of class ideas outside of the class.[33] During discussions and the end interviews, when a clear understanding of a concept was brought up, I asked how the children could use a class concept outside of this class. The responses usually consisted of variations between two things: bringing two ideas together to create

[33] Cynthia Lightfoot and Micheal Cole, *The Development of Children* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2013), 408.

one great idea and taking another person's idea and building upon it to fit what they were doing. One connection that does not fit with one of those categories was made during Susan's end interview after being asked what she learned from class.

> It was probably the thing with the, you'd go on the wall and you'd move the ball with your body, um, it's, it was kind of like, it was leading me to think about well the earth is kind of round you know it's like the space is squeezing around and moving it, so it made me think more about how we move and how that is so similar to how we move in everyday life.

The way she moved, especially when using the ball, made her think about how she moves out side of the class. The connection made was small and seemed insignificant to Susan; however, this description relates the idea that contact improvisation relates to everyday life.

While in the class, it was evident that the children were able to understand abstract ideas and started to use critical thinking and problem solving during scores and reflections without prompting. Though they were not aware of how to transfer the information to areas outside of the class, some alluded to how contact improvisation affected activities and interactions outside of the class. Susan made it clear through her interviews that she feels restricted in many of her activities and feels as though she does things wrong and is always trying to do things right. Coming into the class with this thought led Susan to feel free from having to be perfect and getting everything right. During the end interview Susan mentioned that taking this class affected how she used her instrument in her music lessons. Normally she is tense and squeaks the instrument when she plays it, but Susan commented that after this class she become softer leading her to not getting in trouble as much in her lessons. Though a direct correlation cannot be made,

Ashley's mother commented that Ashley had become less needy and more confident at home. From Ashley's interview comments and journals regarding how leading and moving was the best time in her life, it could be concluded that giving Ashley the opportunity to express herself in a positive, supportive, and encouraging environment while providing opportunities for her to take responsibility for her choices, movement, and suggestions for variations on score may have assisted in that change. Even though there were not many connections made to how experiencing contact improvisation affected these children's lives, the connections that were made provide the ground for more inquiry into this topic.

Community

In the ten weeks of class, the children formed a community of practice around contact improvisation. They created knowledge based on the interactions and discussions in class. During Ashley's end interview, she referenced community and responsibility for the group through her explanation of why she trusts others in the class.

> I know they are not going to trip me or something if I'm going to um perform, they're not going to go over there and try to do something to hurt me and um I trust them because they like make sure they can help me if something is wrong or … it's hard to describe what I'm trying to say um they can um like I help them and they know they can trust me or believe in me.

Further examination of this response showed that not only is trust being defined, but her reply also gives insight into how this community understands and deals with safety and responsibility. Ashley commented on how trust runs both ways within a partnership, that she trusts others because they depend on and trust her as well. There is also an understanding of not intentionally putting others in harms way and

watching out for others if they need help. There is a reference to the support the community gives each individual, or at least awareness that they would get support if it were needed. This type of trust, commitment to the group, acceptance, support, and awareness of each other can bring responsiveness to the energy created in the space while dancing.

Trust

Contact improvisation can address trust; as participants begin to explore the form and dance with others, each individual starts to understand specific boundaries with touch in situations and to what extent the participant trusts his or her self and partner. People's perceptions, experiences, physical body, and intellect are constantly developing and changing, and in contact improvisation they effect each participant's relationship with touch causing constant adjustment to those boundaries and what they mean. One of the challenging ideas is the ability to trust the self enough to engage and explore limits with a partner. These six children were willing to explore these boundaries due to the support in the space and the scores centered on addressing self-awareness and presence.

During different classes, trust was brought up in the children's journals and reflections. One of the first scores in class addressing trust was during the second class. During the score one partner closed their eyes while the other led them through the space at different speeds and directions, and allowed them to feel different objects in the room. For some of the children this was the first time they moved together; however, when asked whether they kept their eyes closed or not and why, Mary wrote, "I was able to keep my eyes closed because I was trusted."

Mary was the first partner to close her eyes, and she seemed a little hesitant to fully follow her partner. Her response to why she kept her eyes closed seems to mean that she trusted herself with her eyes closed.

The second time trust was addressed was when the children asked to do trust falls, when one partner stands in front and falls backwards so their partner can catch them. During this exercise it was clear that it was scary to trust the others to catch them, and some of the children did not trust their classmates at all. Their journals revealed how they felt about doing trust falls.

SUSAN. The trust fall was hard. I felt that I would die. I weigh a lot so it took a team to lift me.

ASHLEY. It was fun because we had a partner and we had to trust our partner to catch us. It was also scary because we had to stand in a circle and we had to fall in any direction.

MARY. I didn't trust anyone, it was scary. I just kept moving my feet.

MOLLLY. Worried, fun, scary, exciting, people when pushing you around, drop.

EMILY. Trust falling was hard. I felt light.

Half way through the classes the children did not have too much trust in each other when it came to taking weight; however, by the end of the classes they started to define when they trusted their classmates and when the did not.

In the end interviews, most of the children said that they trusted each other in class; however, some said they only trusted their classmates in certain situations. When asked if she trusted the other children in class, Mary shook her head yes, but would not give a reason why. After Mary was asked if she trusted the class even while dancing, she again said yes, but gave no further reason. This was a different response than Mary gave half way through the classes when Mary said she did not trust anyone. Emily responded saying she trusted the other children in class "cause

I've danced with [them]," and Ashley said "yes *[definitely]* cause um I know that they are going to like um be safe and they're not going to try to hurt me." Susan and Elizabeth said they trusted the other children in the class under certain situations.

> SUSAN. Yeah, I trust them unless they'd say oh during trust falls, oh yeah we'll catch you, but unless I'm positive they'd catch me or I'm pretty sure that they're not. I don't really know them enough for me to um to trust them. I don't, you know, then I wouldn't really do trust falls with them cause I don't want to end up on the floor.

Susan is cautious about when she trusts others, specifically when it comes to weight sharing and counterbalancing. When Susan danced with me near the end of the classes she was nervous when I lifted her during the weight sharing score, which aligns with her discomfort with being off the floor. Elizabeth, on the other hand, did not trust some of the other children in conversations or stories they told, but trusts them in class because "there's like a teacher watching them." Knowing when and how far to trust a partner is important in creating openness and play with in a dance.

Beyond knowing when to trust others in a contact improvisation class, practitioners also should know their own limits and trust that they can take care of themselves. During the last interviews the children were asked what they would do if they were in a dangerous situation while dancing. This question addressed the ideas of self-trust and trust of others. Ashley gave an example from the performance saying she would "slow down and then they would slow down if they were going fast." This response demonstrated Ashley's trust in herself by knowing when something was dangerous and that she can change the situation by changing her actions. Mary connected the idea of weight sharing and going in and out of the floor

to staying safe with her partner by saying she "would become softer like silly putty, [because] it would slow the other person down." When asked who Molly was trusting to make sure they are safe while dancing with a partner, she responded saying that she trusted "kind of both of [them] cause if they start to think um maybe something bad might happen that [I] trust[ed] them that they might do something else." Most of the children responded that they trusted themselves to stay safe, two included trusting others to watch out for them as well, and Susan mentioned that she would stop the situation, talk through it, and then find an alternative solution to the act. It was interesting to see that even though some of them did not trust others in the class, that they trusted themselves dancing with everyone in the class and that no one would intentionally put them in harms way.

Group Thought and Sense of Community

During the classes the children demonstrated an awareness of the group in each class. The children kept a visual awareness on the whole space while also giving their attention to their partner. When asked how Emily knew that the class was doing something together, she responded that she could "see it [because] I looked over to them every second." Giving attention to the whole class showed how the community was often more important than the individual. During the end interviews, the children were asked if they felt like they had to join the group if everyone was dancing together, and everyone responded that they did not need to join the group if they did not like what the group was doing. Following up on their responses, I asked what made them join or leave the group. Elizabeth, who usually loves dancing with others, responded simply with an "I like to," while Ashley

commented on how she decided when to leave the group saying, “when everybody started to do their own um thing I would just um go or leave and do something I wanted to do, or if they weren’t doing the same thing I’d do what I wanted to do.” The children knew that contact improvisation allowed them to be open and respond to what they wanted to do, but they often gave just as much attention to the class community as they did to their own desires.

As a class, the children often valued the sense of community over the individual. There was no personal offense taken when the children switched from partner to partner within a score giving the suggestion that they still felt they were dancing with people whether they were in contact with someone or not. Many of the children mentioned that they switched partners or left the group when they did not like the movement or got bored; however, I noticed that the children were not self-conscious and did not get upset when their partner decided to dance with another person or left the group to do something else. This was a bit surprising because many of the children mentioned that “if I had my own ideas and I didn’t like what they were doing I would have done something else,” or “okay I’m getting kind of bored with this now I want to now, just get up and go.” It seemed that since more value was given to the movement and the group, it was understood that when the children wanted to do something else, they would just leave and start something else. The person left behind usually either ran off to dance with another partner or started to dance on their own. Susan specifically addressed this during a discussion about whether it was harder to dance with a partner or alone.

> Dancing by yourself is kind of cool because you can dance by yourself and when you get bored you can go back to dancing with a partner, and then when you get bored of that you can just go back and forth back and forth.

This shows that the understanding of when to switch between partners and solo dances had more to do with the desire to dance alone or another person and less to do with being bored with a specific person. The children created an understanding within the class of how to cater to their individual needs as well as interact with the group.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

This study was an investigation of children's experience with contact improvisation. An interpretive phenomenological framework was used to find their direct experience through the use of questionnaires, interviews, and observation to find the meaning in these experiences. Contact improvisation is approached in many different ways depending on the experiences of the facilitator, the community of practice, and the individuals. The results found in this study are specific to the six children whom participated in the study. However, connections can be made and questions arise about the benefits of practicing contact improvisation with children. Over the course of ten weeks, these six children went from not knowing what contact improvisation was to dancing with college students in front of an audience. The conversations during the end interviews revealed how much the children understood and explored throughout the process.

This research revealed that practicing contact improvisation empowered the children. The main moment where all the children discovered freedom and choice within the movement was after we discussed mixing colors. The children realized that they did not have to plan or try to figure out what the other person was doing, but rather they could choose their own movement in response to their partner's dance. The freedom to choose their movement, the freedom to choose how they related to their partner's movement, and the freedom from constraints brought awareness to the ability to make decisions and create their own scores while

dancing. The children also developed an understanding of self-awareness with how to respond to what was happening in the moment and how to open up the senses to listen and communicate with others. Self-awareness, encouragement to act freely, and the ability to make choices about their own actions and environment they are co-creating led to empowerment.

Practicing contact improvisation with children revealed that the form helped them quiet their body and mind in order to open their senses. All the children were heavily dependent on sight and the visual sense of experiencing the movement and concepts. The children were visually oriented to the point of ignoring their other senses even when in physical contact. Remaining mainly visually oriented caused the children to take smaller risks, try to control their partners, and have a sense of the possibility of doing things wrong. Through focusing on both dancing with their eyes shut and kinesthetic communication and listening, the children increased their awareness of themselves, community, and their creativity.

Contact improvisation created a strong sense of community within the group in part by the scores' focus on opening the children's awareness and senses. Though I was looking into how contact improvisation could bring awareness to the individual within a community, the sense of community that formed was beyond what I had expected. Even though there were personality and energy differences, a sense of community and support developed. During the warm-up for the lecture demonstration, I walked away at one point, and the children continued to explore and play together due to the strong sense of community as well as the knowledge and "rules" they had generated within that community.

One of the relationships generally understood by the class was the idea that no one was there to intentionally hurt anyone, and that everyone supported each other. The children knew if they needed help or were nervous, others in the group would be there to help and encourage them. Another idea generated by the community was that the scores and movements in the space were held above personal feelings. Each child mentioned that they would move on if they were bored or did not like something, but no one was offended or self-conscious because of someone leaving a duet. Leaving and switching partners came from the desire to change the movement or relationship with the space and less about a specific person. Whatever the children were doing, they were still dancing together as part of the whole community. Midway through the classes, the children challenged each other's thoughts, approaches, and solutions through discussions. The children felt free to express what they felt or thought even if it was different than another's, which encouraged them to go deeper than they had previously.

Through experiencing contact improvisation, the children started to shift how they learned and embodied information. The children started to learn through exploration instead of replicating what their partner or I was doing. Without prompting, the children started to make connections within scores, sharing them with the group and in their journal. Near the beginning there was still a sense of the score having a correct response or goal; however, by the end of the classes the children started to offer their own realizations, including the children's thought process, even if it was not the same as others. Through contact improvisation the children were starting to understand that they could find their own path and

understanding of the scores and concepts through problem solving and critical thinking.

Through this research the question of what the children's embodied experiences and the relationship to their development combined. Contact improvisation caused these children to become stronger due to bringing awareness to their bodies in relationship to the floor, each other, and choice. The community that built over the course of the ten weeks generated knowledge and rules which distinguished them as a group and helped them to work together. The questions and discussions in class over the course of the ten weeks developed the way the children processed information by increasing their critical thinking skills. This research study has shown that the six children benefited from learning contact improvisation, which leads to more questions about how this form can become available to a greater population including what ways it could be most beneficial.

Further Research

This research is the beginning of finding what experiences, perceptions, and benefits are associated with teaching children contact improvisation. Though current research showed no definitive connection between contact improvisation and the children's educational, social, and family lives, further research could be done in this area. The findings of this study indicated that the scores created in class influenced the children's participation in other activities. Future studies can be conducted more specifically to determine the possibility of contact improvisation positively benefiting how children interact and learn in school, sports, or other arts. Another step in this research is to teach contact improvisation within the school

day. A case could be made that this study targeted a certain kind of child, and that the findings are specific to these children. More studies would need to be completed in different populations and settings in order to generally find how contact improvisation could affect children.

REFERENCES

Brooks, Jacueline G. and Brooks Martin G. *In Search of Understanding: The Case for Constructivist Classrooms*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development, 1999.

Dewy, John. "My Pedagogic Creed." accessed February 13, 2013. http://dewey.pragmatism.org/creed.htm.

Drath, Wilfred H. and Palus, Charles J. *Making common sense: leadership as meaning-making in a community of practice*. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership, 1994.

Heckler, Richard. "Working with Children." *Contact Improvisation* 9, no. 2 (1984): 9-16.

Jamrog, Sandra. "Baby Contact." in *Contact Improvisation Sourcebook v. 1*, edited by Nancy Stark Smith and Lisa Nelson, 225. Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 1997.

Koteen, David and Smith, Nancy Stark. *Caught Falling The Confluence of Contact Improvisation, Nancy Stark Smith, and Other Moving Ideas.* Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 2008.

Lepkoff, Daniel. "Contact Improvisation: A Question." *Contact Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2011): 38-40.

Lepkoff, Daniel. "Contact Improvisation, or, What Happens When I Focus My Attention on the Sensations of Gravity, the Earth, and My Partner?." *Contact Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (2000): 62-63.

Lepkoff, Daniel. "The Education Value of Contact Improvisation for the College Student," In *Contact Improvisation Sourcebook v. 1*, edited by Nancy Stark Smith and Lisa Nelson, 55. Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 1997.

Ligntfoot, Cynthia and Cole Micheal. *The Development of Children.* 7th ed. New York: Worth Publishers, 2013.

Lusterman, Alice. "Structuring Contact Activities for Children with Learning Disabilities." *Contact Quarterly: A Vehicle for Moving Ideas* 9, no. 1 (1983): 15-20, 47-51.

Mason, Jennifer. *Qualitative Researching.* 2nd ed. London: Sage, 2002.

Novack, Cynthia J. *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.

Paxton, Steve. "Chute Transcript," In *Contact Improvisation Sourcebook v. 1*, edited by Nancy Stark Smith and Lisa Nelson, 86-87. Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 1997.

Paxton, Steve. "Fall After Newton Transcript," In *Contact Improvisation Sourcebook v. 1*, edited by Nancy Stark Smith and Lisa Nelson, 142-143. Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 1997.

Paxton, Steve. "Steve Paxton." You Tube Video, 6:40, posted by "contactimprovdoc." July 28, 2008. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XrUeYbUmhQA.

Pritchard, Alan and Woollard, John. *Psychology for the classroom: constructivism and social learning*. London: Routledge, 2010.

Raker, Lauren Shapiro. "A Contact Project with Young Children." In *Contact Improvisation Sourcebook v. 1*, edited by Nancy Stark Smith and Lisa Nelson, 219. Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 1997.

Smith, Nancy Stark. "Harvest: One History of Contact Improvisation." In *Contact Quarterly's Contact Improvisation Sourcebook v.2*, edited by Nancy Stark Smith and Lisa Nelson. 318-326. Northanpton, MA: Contact Editions, 2008.

Smith, Nancy Stark. Interview by Angel Crissman. Discussion. Earthdance Plainfield, MA, January 18, 2013.

Smith, Nancy Stark. Interview by Angel Crissman. Discussion. Earthdance Plainfield, MA, January 21, 2013.

Smith, Nancy Stark. Interview by Angel Crissman. Discussion. Earthdance Plainfield, MA, January 23, 2013.

Smith, Nancy Stark and Nelson, Lisa. "Contact Improvisation Sourcebook v. 1."

Stone, Judy. "Giant Steps Contacting Children with Neuro-Integrative Dysfunction." In *Contact Improvisation Sourcebook v. 1*, edited by Nancy Stark Smith and Lisa Nelson, 218. Northampton, MA: Contact Editions, 1997.

Tuohy, Dympna. "An Overview of Interpretive Phenomenology as a Research Methodology." *Nurse Researcher.* 20:6, (2013), 17-20.

Wegner, Etienne. "Communities of Practice: a brief introduction." *Wegner- Trayner*. accessed February 5, 2014, url: http://wenger-trayner.com/wp-

content/uploads/2012/01/06-Brief-introduction-to-communities-of-practice.pdf.

Willig, Carla. “Perspectives on the Epistemological Basis for Qualitative Research.” In *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology: Vol. 1 Foundations, Planning, Measures, and Psychometrics.* edited by H. Cooper, 11-14. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2012.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Sample Beginning Interview Questions

Tell me about yourself.

If I asked your family to tell me about you, what would they say?

If I asked your friends to tell me about you, what would they say?
Tell me about your friends?

What makes them your friends?

What does listening mean?

Who do you trust?

Why do you trust them?

Are there any time that you touch or come into contact with your family or friends?

Sample End Interview Questions

The interviews started different for each child depending on how they entered the room, and how the topic of how they were doing fed into the topics I wanted to cover.

Interview questions for the end

What was it like dancing for other people?

What did you see when you watched the older kids doing the same dance you were doing?

How did it make you feel?

What did you learn?

What did you want try?

Did you dance differently after you saw the older kids dance?

Why did it not influence you, and how did you dance differently if it did influence you?

How did you know that everyone one was doing something together?

What made you join the group?

Did you feel that you had to join the group?

How did you decided to stop what the group was doing and dance something new?

What did you like the best from the classes?

What do you remember learning? Physical/concepts?
What did you learn that was not movement?

Can you think of anything outside of class that you could use (insert the idea they presented) for?

Did you tell anyone about the class?

What did you tell them about the class?

Do you consider the other dancers in the class your friends? Why?

Do you trust them? Why?

If you were in a place that was dangerous and you might of gotten hurt what did you do?

Is there anything else you would like to say about the class?

APPENDIX B

JOURNAL AND CLASS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Sample Journals Questions

Was (insert the name of the score, or concept in the score) easy or hard, and what made it that way?

What do you remember about (insert the name of the score)?

What do you have to think about in order to (insert the name of the score, or concept in the score)?

What did you think about (insert the name of the score, or concept in the score)?

What was it like to (insert the name of the score, or concept in the score)?

What was different between (the two scores) and how?

Did (insert the name of the score) make you think of something you would like to try?

What would you like to try next?

What did you learn (insert the name of the score)?

What did you feel (insert the name of the score)?

What did you feel that way?

Write anything you want about today.

Sample Discussion Questions

Discussions often started by asking the most pertinent question from the journal questions.

What hints can you give us so that we can (insert concept of the score)?

What happens if (furthering the answer given to previous questions)?

APPENDIX C

GUARDIAN QUESTIONAIRES

Beginning Questionnaire

Guardian Questionnaire

Please answer the questions as detailed and truthful as you can. If you are unable to answer a question for any reason please skip the questions. No one will have access to these questionnaires outside of the study. The children in the classes will not read these questionnaires. This information will only be used to more clearly obtain and understand the personality of the child. Names will not be used in any writing that results from this study.

1. How does your child interact **verbally** and **physically** with parents/guardians?

2. How does your child interact **verbally** and **physically** with siblings?

3. How does your child interact **verbally** and **physically** with extended family?

4. How does your child interact **verbally** and **physically** with friends?

5. How does the child respond in tough or stressful situations?

6. What awareness does the child have in the choices they make?

End Questionnaire

Guardian Questionnaire Name:

Please answer the questions as detailed and truthful as you can. If you are unable to answer a question for any reason please skip the questions. No one will have access to these questionnaires outside of the study. The children in the classes will not read these questionnaires. This information will only be used to more clearly obtain and understand the personality of the child. Names will not be used in any writing that results from this study.

1. Did your child talk about the class at home? In what manner or attitude was the discussion? What did they talk about?

2. Did your child play with some of the movement concepts at home (to the best of your knowledge, dancing differently or more at home)

3. Did you child interact in a different manner verbally and physically with family, extended family, or friends?

4. What awareness does the child have in the choices they make?

5. How does the child respond in tough or stressful situations?

APPENDIX D

CHILDREN'S DEFINITIONS OF CONTACT IMPROVISATION

During the end interviews, I asked the children how they would describe contact improvisation to someone who was thinking about taking the class.

EMILY. Eh that it is fun because we do inversions and rolls

SUSAN. I'd tell them that it's about not having a set of rules to follow, it's not like um, it's not like any other dance class like ballet where you have to memorize this it's something that you have to just, you come off the bat, there's no studying, you know if you want to study learning how to move doing dance moves that you can do then yeah you can but it's not like, you just do it when you want to

ASHLEY. I'd say it's um a dance, a nice dance class where you can, where you're taught things that um once you're taught as much as you can be taught you can make up your own ideas and it's more of a dance thing because you're doing what you want to do that's like dancing, like we danced like a panda or stick or horse or any other animal or object or an apple [laughs] yeah

MARY. It's like you dance at the recital without a routine and you like learn different kinds of roles and that's all I can really think of.

APPENDIX E

INSTITIONAL REVIEW BOARD FORMS

Children's Experience with Contact Improvisation

Contact Improvisation Classes

For more information or to register your child please email
Angel Crissman at [email address] or contact her at [phone number]

Dance: Contact Improvisation

Instructor: Angel Crissman **11 weeks**
A combination of creative movement/improvisation, gymnastics, and modern dance, utilizing both solo and partner work. This class works on strength, flexibility, individuality, problem solving, body control, and creativity.

Classroom: Physical Education Building East, Room 190
Arizona State University – Tempe Campus

ages 8-10
Sep 21-Dec 7 **Twelve weeks** **Saturday 11am-12pm**

No class on November 30 due to Thanksgiving Break

Children's Experience with Contact Improvisation
Parent Consent Form

Dear _____:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Karen Schupp in the School of Dance at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to make meaning out of elementary school aged students' experiences with Contact Improvisation and if and how studying the form positively effects learning. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information that will help you decide if you will give consent for you and your child to participate in this research.

I am inviting you and your child's participation in this study, which will involve you answering a questionnaire at the beginning and end of the study. These questionnaires should take roughly 20 minutes. Your child will be asked to participate in an interview at the beginning and the end of the study and answer questions about how he/she sees him/herself, how he/she defines terms used in class, and how he/she interacts with friends and family. Your child will also be asked to participate in the Contact Improvisation class and to write and draw in a notebook about response to different exercises and questions asked in class. At the end of the semester, your student will be asked to perform in a concert. You and your child's participation in this study are voluntary. You and your child may decline participation at any time. You may also withdraw yourself or your child from the study at any time; there will be no penalty. You or your child can decide to switch over to another activity offered at the same time with no fee or cost to you.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you or your child, the possible benefit of you and your child's participation is a better understanding how this type of dance form can benefit students and if there is a benefit to adding it to dance curriculums. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you and your child's participation beyond the expected risks of children participating in physical activities, for example other dance forms or sports. The classes and interviews will be video taped to insure accuracy in the interpretation of my observations. These will only be used in the performance at the end of the semester and for my notes, and not in any presentations or publications. The information obtained in this study will be kept locked in Professor Schupp's office where only those involved in the study will have access, and will be destroyed after May of 2016.

Responses will be kept confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but pseudonyms will be used for your name and your child's name.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your child's participation in this study, please call me Angel Crissman at [phone number].

Sincerely,

Angel Crissman

By signing below, you are giving consent for you and your child _____ (Child's name) to participate in the above study and consent to video tape the interview and classes for use in the performance at the end of the term and academic presentations.

_____	_____	_____
Signature	Printed Name	Date

If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

Children's Experience with Contact Improvisation
Child Assent Form

My name is Angel Crissman, and I work at Arizona State University.

I am asking you to take part in a research study because I am trying to learn more what you think and feel when you take a dance class called Contact Improvisation. Contact Improvisation is a mixture of modern dance, acrobatics, and creative movement/improvisation. Your parent(s) have given you permission to participate in this study.

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in the Contact Improvisation dance class. You will be asked to write and draw in your own notebook. What you write in the notebook will only be used for my project and will not be shared or read by the class or your parents. You will be asked to talk with me about how you interact with friends and family and how you define words we will use in the class. Answering these questions will take about 20 minutes. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. The classes will be video recorded, but will only be used in the performance and not shown as part of anything else.

You do not have to be in this study, it is voluntary. Even if you start the study, you can stop later if you want, and you may ask questions about the study at any time.

If you decide to be in the study I will not tell anyone else how you respond or act as part of the study. Even if your parents or teachers ask, I will not tell them about what you say or do in the study.

Signing here means that you have read this form or have had it read to you and that you are willing to be in this study.

Signature of subject_____

Subject's printed name _____

Signature of investigator_____

Date_____